つきツキ!

Tsuki Tsuki!

10

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「—P, PLEASE MAKE ME YOUR PET」

WHAT AN INCREDIBLE IMPACT. WHEN I FELT MY OWN CHEEKS INADVERTENTLY GETTING HOT, KAORUN SHOWED MACHINA A CRIB SHEET TOO.

「…TONIGHT, DO IT FROM BEHIND♥ LIKE HELL!」

『PLEASE, DEAR BROTHER.
STAY WITH ME A BIT LONGER.
DON'T GO,
DEAR BROTHER.』

I STARTED TO RAISE MY HIPS ALONG WITH HER VEHEMENT REQUEST, BUT FASTER THAN THAT MACHINA CHANGED HER POSITION WITH ATTITUDE AND OF ALL THINGS CLUNG TO ME FROM THE FRONT TO STOP MY MOVEMENTS.

SUDDENLY A SWEET SOPRANO VOICE SOUNDED, THEN THE BOTTOM PRESSING ONTO MY FACE STARTED TO CONVULSE AND FOLLOWING LUNA'S BEWITCHING MOAN REACHED MY EARS.

「MM......WHEN YOU PLAY A PERVERTED PRANK LIKE THAT, EVEN I WILL PLAY ONE ON YOU.」

Prologue

"—Hey Shinobu, what would you do if I were to disappear?"

Reluctantly spilled words. Amber eyes flickering with worry. Slightly bitten, well-formed lips. While I looked at her expression, my anxiety grew.

"What do you mean… by disappear?"

The voice coming from my voice was unexpectedly stiff.

Machina Liebelei Orangelo. The girl in front of me was one of our freeloaders, Luna's little stepsister and a hybrid devil, but she was just like family to me.

Therefore her words that hinted a farewell agitated me considerably.

On the way home from school. Machina was rooted on by all classmates with smiles to run for the student council election. While she arrived on our home road together with me, she seemed to ponder about her participation in the election. But amidst that, Machina mentioned that her father Bram replied with a letter on a rare occasion. Now she had her expression clouded and I continued my words in confusion.

"You won't go anywhere, will you?"

"…It's not like it'll be right away. But, my father said I should come back to the demon realm soon in his letter… So I'm hesitant about the election."

Temporarily stopping her words, Machina smiled sadly.

"Running for the election, even though I might go away, is ridiculous, right?"

"…You plan to go back to the demon realm?"

"I don't know yet. It's seems my father is coming over here soon, so I plan to decide then."

Machina's words weren't the ones I was hoping for. I wanted her to say that she had no plans to go back. But,

"…I don't know your reasons, but if you want to stay with everyone, you're always welcome in our house. If you don't want to go back, just tell me. I'll help you then."

When I called out to her softly, Machina slightly dampened her eyes and hung her head a bit like that.

“You’re sly, Shinobu. Usually you’re screwing around, yet at a time like this you’re so kind.”

“Because it’s you. Of course I’ll be kind.”

When I lightly petted her head along with my words, Machina tightly grabbed the sleeve of my clothes after a short pause while still hanging her head.

“Hey Shinobu, I’ll tell the others about the election and my father’s visit, but keep it a secret from Nazuna and Tomoe-san for now that I might go back to the demon realm.”

“…From Nazuna too?”

My mother didn’t know that Luna and Machina were devils. But Nazuna…

“I don’t want to worry her unnecessarily.”

Cutting into my thoughts, Machina raised her head and continued.

“Once it’s all decided, I’ll tell them. Please keep quiet until then.”

“…Okay. But if you change your mind, talk to Nazuna.”

When I replied so, Machina nodded with “Yes” and removed her hand from my sleeve.

“Let’s go home… before it gets late.”

While walking onwards as to end the conversation, Machina softly took my hand.

Her hand was soft and really warm. However, it was rare for Machina to take my hand out of her own initiative like this. She held my hand somewhat gentle and smiled kind of forced… My anxiety gradually grew bigger.

Afterwards I kept having silly conversations with her, but unrest and impatience were swelling up inside my chest and Machina kept holding my hand with her warm palm all the way home…

Chapter 01: A really familiar and warm Place

…This might come out of nowhere, but my vision was pitch black. Regardless of my eyes being open, I strangely couldn't see anything. However, I didn't feel really worried, quite the contrary, the sweet and aromatic fragrance tickling my nasal cavities was pleasant. Moreover, the mild warmth I felt on my cheeks relieved me from the outside cold, but

"Yahn… Shinobu… Not… Uhn… there…"

Just what kind of situation was this? Machina's overly bewitching voice reached my ears. Suddenly returning to my senses, I got a somewhat bad feeling, but I should arrange my confused brain for now.

Evening on a holiday. Today I asked out Machina to keep me company with my training and we came to a nearby shrine. Following I parked the bicycle we rode on near the grounds and we headed for the back of the hill behind the shrine, starting the training there at once.

As I was aiming to be an exorcist, I wanted to let my body get used to a devil's attack and defence now. Most likely we didn't have to worry about being seen by anyone in this isolated place and Machina could use her powers to her heart's content.

That said, bringing Machina with me for training wasn't the only reason and she herself wasn't all that eager either, but that didn't matter now.

Dodging Machina's air bullets with minimum movements, I closed the distance to her by making a big leap while evading.

Smashing up two incoming bullets with a backhand blow and a roundhouse kick with my bangs swaying, I continued my movement without losing momentum and made a fluent turn to the side while still leaping forward. Now I just needed to strike a blow with my right fist by making use of the centrifugal force… but I couldn't do that.

My opponent was Machina. There was no way I could raise my fist against her. I relaxed my attacking hand at once, but regrettably Machina was too close. Moreover, I couldn't alter my movements any further in midair.

"H- Hey, Shinobu— Kyaa!"

For the time being Machina tried backing off hastily, but it seemed to be too late.

I ended up tackling Machina around her waist and collapsed on the spot while dragging Machina down with me— But seconds before that, I instantly extended my arms with all my might and put them around the back of her head and her waist, which cushioned her fall, so Machina probably was unharmed.

The moment we fell, something black fleetingly flashed over the edge of my vision, but from then on until the present time it was pitch black in front of my eyes.

I tried to recall what just happened, but I couldn't quite grasp the current situation. Moreover I smelled something sweet for a while now. There was a warmth on my cheeks. Likewise, I was concerned about the soft and tender sensation on the tip of my nose. Just what was going on…?

I couldn't help but get a bad feeling and the alarm siren in the corner of my head urged me to stop. However, the slight suffocation tempted me to move my head softly to the left and right, whereupon

"Noo… What're you doing, Shinobu… Don't rub… Uhn… there…"

"Ehm, even if you say that, just what is this at all?"

"Th- The heck are you asking! There's no way I can say it. Anyway… Mm… Don't move… Fuhn… any more, okay?"

"But it's hard to breathe."

"Ahn… No more… talking either…"

Then what was I supposed to do?

Machina's tone of voice gradually became sexier. Could this place be Machina's… I certainly got worried like that, whereupon suddenly the warmth on my cheeks slowly went away.

This was a chance. I should pull back from here at once.

I drew back my head with attitude, albeit shaking, but apparently that unintentionally ended up, well, strongly rubbing against Machina's sensitive place.

"YAAAHN!"

Suddenly she raised an enchanting voice and next I felt a plump and soft sensation on my cheeks. My cheeks were tightly pinched in-between that and Machina shivered her body a bit.

"…Even though I told you not to move… Just stay… still, okay?"

Her tone was filled with shyness and my head got lightly pinned down, as to stop my movements.

Judging by the supple sensation, I believed that it were Machina's hands that were touching my head.

Also, I didn't know it earlier, but without doubt it were Machina's thighs that warmly wrapped up both my cheeks.

Smooth skin with a wetness that softly stuck it to my cheeks. A juicy flexibility transmitted from her strapping nice thighs. Moreover, as I was glued to Machina, I could smell her sweet fragrance even better than before, which honestly was quite nice.

But, when I classified the situation once again, I had completely plunged headfirst into Machina's skirt and continued sexual harassment like actions.

…Holy cow. Anxiety hit me hard. While all the blood drained out of my head in no time, I noticed the worst of all things. That I couldn't breathe here after all.

Most likely because I was strongly glued to Machina. As I was closely sticking to her without any gap, my nostrils were covered by something fluffy and it really became suffocating. However Machina didn't seem to notice my distress and breathed out once with "Fuh".

…This couldn't continue. I felt bad for her, but unable to endure it any longer, I moved my body once again in demand for oxygen, whereupon

"Hyahn… Why again… Mm… Hey… Don't… play around…"

No, no, I wasn't playing around, but I just wanted to breathe. I desperately lamented like that, but only unclear words like "Mgmg" left my mouth.

"Ahh… If you… move your lips like that… Ahn…"

Finally a lovely soprano voice spilled out of Machina's mouth, which made me feel incredible sorry. If possible, I wanted to stop moving at once. However the lack of oxygen made my consciousness hazy. I might lose my consciousness inside the skirt of a girl.

That was way too pathetic.

But the more I struggled, the stronger she pinned down my head and at the same time the pressure of her thighs became stronger. Apparently I fell into a vicious circle.

"Yah… why are you so mean? Please… Ahhh… Don't… tease me there…"

A somewhat sweet and weak voice I usually would have never expected from Machina. Even if I didn’t want to, that voice made me want to tease her some— wait, not good. This wasn’t the time for stupid thoughts. I had to get away from Machina quickly or it would be bad. Pulling my lightly cracked reasoning together, I struggled again while still being in lack of oxygen.

“Hahah… Anymore… Mmmm… will be really bad… Can’t hold ba….Yaaah, Noo… Iyaaah… Stupid Shinobu…. Haaaaahn!”

An unexpected enchanted soprano voice echoed loudly, then Machina strongly pinched my cheeks between her soft thighs and shivered her body greatly a few times like that. After that she slowly relaxed.

Well thanks to that I could get away from her without any troubles, but… how should I apologize about it? When I timidly faced her,

"Mm… Hahn…"

Machina had defencelessly spread both her legs, as her tension dispersed, and her black panties, white and glossy thighs, as well as her tempting crotch were freely exposed. Moreover, she was breathing heavily with flushed cheeks and matching with her breathing, her voluminous breasts swayed up and down.

Unintentionally, I was smitten by this beautiful appearance, whereupon Machina puffed up her cheeks a bit upon meeting my eyes and faced sideways.

"…I came out into this cold, because you said that you wanted me to help with your training. I haven't heard anything about such lewd acts. Did you bring me to this isolated place with that intention from the beginning?"

"Kukuku, it's too late to notice now. No matter how much you scream, nobody will come. Next I won't conquer you with words, but with force."

"Eh? No way? Wh- What more do you plan to do…"

"You'll know soon— as if. What kind of pervert am I? Give me your usual retort. And just for the record, that earlier definitely wasn't on purpose. I was desperate, because I couldn't breathe."

"Then why are you still looking at my panties?"

"W- Well, I am truly sorry."

I could no longer warrant it. It wasn't a situation to be screwing around. When I apologized by unintentionally falling into respective speech, Machina fixed her disordered attire with still red cheeks.

"Geez, Shinobu you pervert…"

Once again she faced sideways pouting.

But even while puckering her lips a bit, her tone wasn't harsh, but somewhat warm. She might not be all that angry, but I deeply lowered my head anyway.

"I really feel sorry about having done such a thing. Please forgive me."

"…It's okay. Now that I think about it, there's no way you would do something weird. You even protected me in the fall. I'm not really worried, so you don't need to apologize so much."

Usually she would say "To make up for it, accompany me for shopping", yet for some reason Machina was really kind. When I raised my head perplexed, she was faintly smiling, albeit with still flushed cheeks, and even my cheeks became hot, as her reaction was just so out of place.

While I was completely confused, Machina slowly straightened up her upper body and began talking with "About the earlier training," to change the topic.

"I was a bit surprised. It wasn't like that before, yet my attacks aren't working at all anymore."

"Well, you held back, right? And how should I say it, it might be a bit rude, but you're… not good at controlling your power."

I believed that I made some progress compared to my previous fight with Machina. Of course her forbearingness played a big role, but that included, I somehow understood it in the training now.

Machina was a hybrid devil and certainly could use her demonic powers even in the human world. In the human world her power was probably even greater than Old man Bram's.

But that was all to it. As she wasn't used to fighting, her attack pattern was kind of simple and her movements were rather easy to predict. Blatantly said, pearls thrown before swine.

When I told her that kindly, Machina leaked a faint sigh.

"…I don't really like using my powers. Of course I don't mind for training. But I don't want to hurt anyone after all."

"That's so like you."

"Mh? What do you mean?"

I softly reached out my hand for Machina, who tilted her head, and replied.

"It means truly strong people don't use their strength more than necessary."

"…I think you're the strong one, Shinobu?"

"Nah, I can't match up to you."

I tried to pet her head with these feelings, but sadly it wasn't conveyed well. Machina tilted her head unchanged and I didn't say anything more, wordlessly continuing to pet her head. Then,

"Ehm, I don't quite get it, but thanks, Shinobu."

Machina happily formed her mouth into a sweet smile.

Usually she would get embarrassed from having her head petted and get sulky with "Don't treat me like a kid", but Machina was clearly behaving strange. And not just today.

After the day she told me about the letter reply from Bram, her expression sometimes looked clouded. It must be difficult for her. While petting her head, I slightly corrected my tone.

"Hey Machina, about something else, you aren't going to run for the student council election? You're interested, right? The application time ends soon, you know?"

"…Yes, I am. But I want to think it through a bit longer. Being the student president doesn't really suit me, right? Besides—"

"You might return to the demonic realm, it is?"

When I interjected quietly, Machina's eyes started to flicker faintly and I felt my heart becoming unsettled. But there was something I wanted to confirm, so I firmly looked into her eyes.

"You, yourself have no intention to go back to the demonic realm, have you?"

A reserved question. Not answering it, Machina cast down her eyes to avoid my gaze and fell into a silence with her mouth shut.

If possible, I wanted to know her true feelings. My objective for coming here wasn't just training, but also to confirm about that. But there was no point in forcing an answer out of her. I took a deep breath. After switching my feelings, I softly changed the question.

"Reminds me, was there any contact from Bram afterwards? He's going to show in the near future, right?"

"…I think he'll be here soon. There was no contact in particular, but he's certainly taking his time. Just what is he doing and where?"

"It would be funny if he was caught by the police as a suspicious person."

"Indeed. Right now he might be in jail— wait, what are you making me say! We're talking about my dear father here!"

Temporarily stopping her words, Machina frowned.

"Because you told a weird joke, I got kind of worried!"

"Wh- Why are you worried? It's the old man. It might be weird for me to bring it up, but how distrusted is he…"

When the old man came here before, his strength got extremely exhausted due to forcefully crossing the barrier between the demonic realm and human world.

But I believed he would be fine, so I cracked a joke to give her a peace of mind, but… Well, I got to see Machina's combination of getting tricked and then retorting after a while, so oh well. Her retort seemed somewhat off, but it was still a pleasant feeling.

Standing up with a faint smile, I faced Machina.

"Okay, since we're already here and it's just cold to do nothing, can I ask you to help with my training a bit longer?"

"I don't really mind, but you're getting exorcist training from Hijiri, right? Aren't you going to use talismans?"

Imitating me and standing up, Machina asked doubtful.

"There is an adamant difference in abilities between humans and devils. I think it would be easier to use an exorcist's strength like Hijiri. I don't know much about it myself, but there are some incredible weapons against devils, no?"

"Speaking of weapons, I have one right here."

"Eh? Where? Show me."

Machina leaned forward curiously, whereas I replied by holding out my fist a bit.

"Here, my proud right fist that can even crush rocks."

"…What the. It's just your perverted hand that sometimes makes sexual harassment movements. So much for getting my hopes up."

"Y- You're quite harsh, really."

Even though I was partly serious…

Drawing back my apparently perverted hand, I lightly shrugged my shoulders and explained.

"I was partly joking, but the point is, the strongest weapon is one's body.

My gramps and dad taught me that those who only rely on a weapon are second-rate, except if you control it like a part of your body."

While their faces floated in my head, I clenched my fist with "Besides,".

"My gramps and dad are abnormal humans. Even without an exorcist's strength, I get the feeling they could fight on par with a devil. I want to find out how far I can take it with the skills they taught me, even outside of official matches with other schools."

"Then you don't plan to use the exorcist's strength, even when fighting a devil like me?"

"If possible. Of course I'll rely on it's strength when I have to protect someone or to locate a devil. But in an actual fight with a devil, I would like to only use the Nanjou School."

When I gave an instant answer without hesitation, Machina faintly started to smile and then directed a soft smile at me.

"So you want to become like your grandfather and father."

"…I admired them since I was small."

The words leaving my mouth sounded somewhat envious and after interjecting a small sigh, I shifted my gaze and looked up to clear, blue sky.

"I told you about it, right? That, like you, I was called a 'failure' in the past. Well, that was only at the Dojo of my gramps and might have a difference nuance than for you, but I heard it from the adults a lot."

Still looking up to the blue sky, I recalled the memories from back then with a wry smile.

"They're geniuses. Nazuna-chan is better. You can't become like your grandfather or father. Your disposition is too different.—That's what they said."

Strangely enough, I wasn't angry. It was only painful and hard to breathe.

The pain I felt back then still remained in my chest.

"I certainly might not become like my gramps or dad. Effort won't always pay off. But, I still think I can get close to them…"

I wanted to believe so and struggled until now without giving up, despite the evident difference in talent.

"Well, that's my obstinacy. Childish and lame, isn't it."

“It’s not lame.”
An unexpected warm tone filled with passion. When I took my eyes off the blue sky, Machina was looking straight at me… lightly narrowing her eyes glaring.
“Like I thought, you’re amazing, Shinobu.”
“I can’t match up to you though…”
Earlier it wasn’t conveyed well. Machina was far stronger than me. That said, she herself apparently wasn’t aware of it and she was tilting her head puzzled again. Therefore it would have been good if I had told her properly this time, but
“Well then, about time we move our bodies. Otherwise we’ll freeze up.”
I became somewhat bashful, quickly brought the conversation to an end and resumed the training…

* * *

Breasts with plentiful volume softly pressed onto my back.
I could feel a softness like a sticking out Mochi from the voluminous swellings and a sweet fragrance hung in the air from the elegant red hair over my shoulder, but… why was she clinging to me like this? While paddling the bicycle, my pulse gradually accelerated, which troubled me a bit.
On our way back after finishing the training. Machina sat down on the back of the bicycle, then entwined her arms around my waist and leaned her warm body onto me like that.
An obvious different behaviour from the way there.
Every time the bicycle shook, her two plump white peaches bounced greatly on my back and conveyed the sensation of her flexible breasts.
Moreover, with a somewhat extravagant long sigh,
“Shinobu, your body is so warm…”
Machina clung even more tightly to me, so I just couldn’t calm down and timidly opened my mouth.
“Uhm, Machina-san? Aren’t you clinging to me a bit too much?”
“What’s the problem. It’s easier that way. I’m a bit tired. We did it without end, yet you just wouldn’t be satisfied and didn’t let me rest at

all…"

"We only did normal training, yet it sounds strangely indecent. Could it be, you're seducing me, like Hijiri did a while ago? For a while now, your breasts are pressing on my back, you know?"

"Fufu, they're not pressing onto you, I make them press onto you. Here, my breasts feel really good— No, wait! I told you that I'm merely tired! Yet you go on about seductions, what kind of delusions have you!"

"…Sorry. Guess I behaved like an eight grader. But boys basically always have the mindset of an eight grader. I would appreciate it if you were understanding about that."

"Always have the mindset of an eight grader? In other words, boys are always perverted?"

It was point-blank conclusion, but I couldn't deny it so easily.

While I leaked a wry smile, Machina, regardless of me having teased her, didn't get away and remained clinging to me, asking further with a tone filled with shyness.

"Ehm, then seeing as you have the mindset of a middle schooler, you're perverted as well, Shinobu? I wasn't really aware of it, but when a girl clings to you like this, you get weird delusions after all?"

"…You smell nice. So cute again today."

"Eh? Really? Thanks, Shinobu— wait, you obviously dodged the question. Don't screw around and properly tell me."

"Mhm~ You won't get angry when I'm honest?"

"Wh- Why do you think I would get angry? A- Are you thinking of something perverted?"

"Nah, I think it would be rude instead when I didn't think about that at all."

I replied with a joke to hide my true feelings, but for some reason Machina wouldn't give me back a retort no matter how much time passed and while I felt a bit doubtful, I could hear an unexpected "…*hic*" sobbing voice from behind, so I hastily warranted in my agitation.

"H- Hey, wait! Why are you crying! It was just an joke, you know? I certainly didn't have any weird ideas, but it's a fact that I was quite happy! I apologize, so don't cry!"

“I’m, not crying! Don’t say weird stuff when you can’t even see me. I knew from the beginning that it was a joke.”

For that her voice was rather trembling. But it was only for a moment. Machina leaked a somewhat lively monologue with “…So Shinobu was happy too” and brought her body even closer.

Normally I would give her a piece of advice, yet I was only confused from her reaction.

Somehow my face was hot. So much that I wasn’t bothered by the cold wind brushing my cheeks. As always, Machina smelled nice. However, didn’t I, right after training, reek of sweat?

Suddenly concerned about that, I felt once more restless while paddling the bicycle, whereupon I spotted a familiar girl in the corner of my vision midway on our home road.

Finely chiselled features that resembled a western doll. Dangling pretty silver twintails. Ruby-red eyes.

She was one of our freeloaders, the deplorable girl who called herself a Goddess: Elni.

As she was looking for something, Elni curiously surveyed the surroundings and when I stopped the bicycle, Machina noticed her too.

“…What’s she doing?”

Machina said doubtful, whereupon Elni seemingly noticed us as well and came rushing over while waving her hand greatly.

But as soon as she looked at me, Elni puffed up her cheeks a bit for some reason.

“Shinobu, you’re free to go out, but at least you have to answer your cell phone. I called numerous times, but only got the answering machine, so I looked for you two in this cold the whole time. Thanks to that, I’m chilled to the bones! Just what are you going to do about that!”

“I’ll have Machina warm you up.”

“Me? Well, okay…”

Showing no signs of resistance in particular, Machina tightly enveloped Elni’s hand with both her hands. As Machina didn’t show her usual tricked&retort combo, Elni looked a bit disappointed. When I checked my cell phone while giving the two a side-glance, there were a few missed calls from Elni, just like she had said.

“…Sorry Elni. Seems like I didn’t notice, because I was absorbed in the training. But what’s up? You need something from us?”

“Yeah! I came to tell you two big news! I think you’ll be surprised!”

As she wasn’t all too angry, Elni faintly smiled when I brought up the subject and after creating a dramatic pause with “Actually…”, she declared something surprising with a smile.

“Bram is at the house right now! Let’s hurry home, you two!”

“….One sec. The old man is at our house?”

While I and Machina looked at each other, Elni explained with a wry smile.

“You just missed each other. For the time being we all waited for the two of you, but you just wouldn’t come back and the cell phone didn’t connect…”

“So you went out to look for us, huh.”

Our timing to leave was bad. After covering my face with one hand in regret, I renewed my spirit and looked at Machina.

“Well then, let’s get home quickly. We can’t let the old man wait any longer.”

“Ah, ehm, I want to drop by somewhere before…”

“Can’t you do it another time? The old man rarely comes over here. Besides, don’t you have to talk with him?”

When I softly prompted so, Machina faintly dropped her voice with “Yeah”, as she felt uneasy about meeting the old man? Amidst that, Elni cheerfully climbed onto the bicycle with a smile, then slipped her slender body into the front basket.

“…What’re you doing?”

“Fufu, don’t say anything more, Shinobu. A cool bicycle with a cool driver. With the cool me added to it, it’s perfect.”

“Yeah, I want the bicycle to stay cool, so could you get out there at once?”

Even while I gave a little harsh retort like that, Elni stayed in the front basket with a bitter expression and I kicked the pedals with stand-up cycling.

There suddenly a soft fragrance, the smell of shampoo?, grazed my nose tip. Elni’s silver hair swayed in the wind and were tinged with a radiance, carrying the pleasant fragrance over to me.

Unintentionally I was fascinated by the hair's radiance and fragrance, but I probably shouldn't have Elni ride in the front basket after all. I rode the bicycle back home just fine, but Machina softly got off from the back

"Uh~!"

and Elni struggled in the front basket by raising a sorrowful voice.

I became wearily while still grabbing the handlebar, whereupon Elni apparently gave up on getting out by herself and spoiled held out both her arms towards me.

"Shinobu! My clothes are caught and I can't get out! Help me!"

"…You perfectly fused with the bicycle. Just guard the gate like this. Show your skills as the Mad Dog."

"Graar! Woof, woof!"

As she was either trying to be the Mad Dog or just disagreed, Elni directed a really lovely howl at me, but I turned my back to her with a smile.

"Okay, keep it up like that, Mad Dog."

"U- Uwaaah! I don't want this! Don't abandon me, Shinobu! I'm bad with the cold! I want to get inside too!"

…Teasing her too much would be bad. Elni raised a pitiful voice. Even I thought it was about time to stop the joke, but surprisingly Machina acted before me.

"Here, are you okay?"

Machina softly held out her hand to Elni. On the other hand, Elni was disappointed.

"…Not like that, Machina. You should say your usual queen-like remark of 'Fufu, this suits a puppy like you. If you properly keep guard, I wouldn't mind stepping onto you as an reward' in this situation."

"There's no way I can say that to you, Elni."

Not playing along with the petty foolery, Machina gently pulled Elni's hand.

…It might be due to Machina's unusual reaction. After Elni got down from the bicycle with her help, she stretched herself and started to pet Machina's head.

"E- Elni? Why so suddenly?"

"…Just because."

Machina was still in a bad mood. Elni probably wanted to cheer her up a bit. Machina faintly flushed her cheeks from getting petted on the head. Showing her a negligible sad smile, Elni then headed for the front door. Elni's profile I saw at that time looked somewhat mature.

"…Just like an older sister."

"Usually she's an idiot though."

On my isolated leaked words, Machina nodded small in agreement.

Even while still considering it unusual, I imitated Elni and went into the house together with Machina. When I raised my voice with "I'm home" like always, the door of the living room opened soon enough and a girl of radiant beauty showed up.

Clear emerald-green eyes. Well-formed glamorous lips in a light pink colour. The waist-long hair emitted a pure gold glitter and the perfect body-line with intense up and downs was dazzling to my eyes.

She was the reliable older sister of our house: Luna.

Unfit to her neat aura, Luna happened to be a devil, but I personally wasn't bothered about it. What bothered me instead was the physical contact she often showed lately.

As she was opening her heart, Luna lately hugged and kissed me frequently, which quite chipped away at my reasoning, but she herself didn't seem to be aware of it.

"Welcome home, Shinobu-san, Machina, Elni-chan."

While innocently jiggling her voluminous breasts, she tried to hug onto me along with a smile again today, but I lightly held out my palm and stopped her.

"Sorry, but leave the hug for after my shower. I'm all sweaty from the training."

Then I wanted to pass by composed, but Luna shook her slender waist from itching to do it and as she couldn't hold back anymore, she tightly clung to me from behind with a sweet voice saying "Shinobu-san".

Instantly, two fruits that resembled oversized melons pressed onto my back. I clearly felt the juicy flexibility of her breasts. Receiving this round sensation, I hastily gave her a piece of advice while being gravely agitated.

“H- Hey, I told you I’m sweaty. I stink, so stop it.”

“I am not bothered by the sweat. I love your smell after all, Shinobu-san.”

“Hoo, then engulf yourself into this dandy smell all you want.”

“May I?”

Ah, I shouldn’t have cracked a careless joke.

Luna happily raised a lively voice. While I panicked about my blunder, Luna clung to me even stronger and then Elni interjected reserved.

“Seeing you two so close is wonderful and all, but shouldn’t you go see Bram quickly? I’m sure he’s tired of waiting.”

“No need to worry about my father, Elni-chan.”

Regretfully separating herself from me, Luna continued with a smile.

“Right now he is playing with Nazuna-chan.”

“Is that really not a need to worry…?”

If I remembered correctly, my mother was gone since the morning. She said she would be home late and since Luna was currently here, it meant that Bram and Nazuna were all alone right now.

…I couldn’t help but get worried.

Nazuna might feel awkward. I wanted to go see the old man right away, but for some reason Machina showed a bit of perplexity.

But there was no point in standing around here. While softly pulling her on her arm, I headed somewhat quickly for the living room with her in tow.

Upon that, my vision fell onto a lovely girl and a tall man.

The girl with features that reminded you of a kitten was Nanjou Nazuna. My little sister and an energetic 8th grader. Despite her looks, she happened to be the captain for the karate club.

As for the familiar man, he was without doubt Old man Bram.

Wearing different clothes from when we met before, the old man had put on a black suit and tied his long, red hair at the back. As always he gave off a keen impression that reminded you of a hawk, but because of his finely chiselled features and clothes, he brought about the charm of a foreign actor.

I hurried over here, but apparently my worry was ungrounded.

Surprisingly Nazuna and the Old man were perfectly enjoying a video game while each holding a controller of the game console. The game looked to be a fighting one.

“Yay! My win again!”

“Grr… Once more.”

Nazuna raised both her hands with a smile, whereas the old man replied with a somewhat lenient aura.

It was an unexpectedly heart-warming scene. I would have liked to watch a bit longer, but the two of them seemed to notice me and each called out by waving at me.

“Ah, Brother, Machina-chan, welcome home.”

“I was welcomed in. But you’re back unexpectedly quickly…”

“Well, Nazuna aside, why are even you peeking at the game console, Old man? Could it be, you still wanted to play?”

“Yeah, since there were no amusements devices during my time in the human world. It’s quite interesting. I would like to take it apart once and analyse it’s build-up.”

“Y- You can’t take it apart, Bram-san! The console is quite expensive. I’ll be troubled if it doesn’t work anymore!”

Seeing the Old man’s look, Nazuna hastily guarded the console with both her hands. In regards, the Old man faintly smiled while watching her behaviour, as he was exceedingly enjoying it.

“I don’t grow tired of watching your sister. Reminds me of Machina as a kid. Now if you were to disappear from my sight, I would have nothing to complain.”

“…There’s a lot I want to say, but I won’t concern myself with it today. Anyway, you relatively like kids, Old man?”

“Kids are all adorable.”

“Kind of sounds like a paedophile. I think you would make a good paedophile, Old man.”

“Stop praising— wait, no! You call me a paedophile of all things? Appears you got a screw loose…”

Lifting his tone, the Old man popped up a vein, but seeing that, Luna smiled a bit and for some reason Elni and Nazuna gave an applause while looking at each other.

"That was a perfect tricked&retort combo, Nazucat."

"Indeed, Elni-chan. Maybe it was an imitation of Machina-chan?"

"Ehm, that does not seems to be the case."

Interjecting softly, Luna informed us while still smiling.

"In the past, the familiar of my father called it 'Heredity'."

…In other words, Machina's tricked&retort combo was inherited from the old man.

Somehow Luna brightened her smile with "Though unlike Machina, my father only does it for people he has opened up his heart to", whereas the old man made a sullen face with "…Stop it, Luna", but I ignored most of their exchange and rested a hand comforting on Machina's shoulder.

"You really came after your father."

"W- Well, he IS my father, so it's natural."

"…And your real thoughts?"

"I hate it a bit. If possible, I wanted to be like my mother— wait, don't make me say weird things, Shinobu! My father is right here!"

Machina panicked a bit. In regards, I looked at the old man half jokingly.

"Your relationship with your daughter doesn't seem good. It appears she hates it a bit."

"Hmp, in time you'll understand too. That's how girls her age are. I'm not really concerned."

"…And your real thoughts?"

"I can't hold back my tears— wait, don't make me say weird things! What's up with you! Is it that fun to tease father and daughter?"

"Couldn't be better. Specially in regards to you, Old man."

When I instantly replied with a bright smile, the old man made a sigh with a bitter face.

"Nanjou, can't you do anything about your frivolous mouth?"

"Sorry. I was born with it."

"Hoo, nothing less from a man that's all talk. Not only do you got a wicked look, but a wicked mouth too. You're beyond help. The girls seem to have taken a liking to you, but I have troubles to understand why."

"…And your real thoughts?"

"That were them!"

H- Huh? In other words, he was being serious?

"Hey Old man, I reluctantly forgive the comment about my wicked mouth, but don't you dare to speak ill of my look. Anyone gets really angry when their complex gets pointed out. You too get angry when treated like a paedophile, right?"

"Hey Brat, don't decide paedophile as my complex on your own. And I shouldn't speak ill of your looks? Don't ask the impossible, when you have eyes that could even kill devils, not just humans. Even I get the shivers when looking at you."

"Haha, says the paedophile that looks like a vampire. You're just picking a fight anyway. Then step outside— Father!"

"Who are you calling father! You step outside! This time for sure I'll strangle you to death, so you won't run your frivolous mouth anymore!"

Nearly at the same time the Old man and I grabbed each other at the collar, whereupon Machina leaked a faint smile and clouded her expression bitter.

"I knew it, Shinobu and Father don't get along. To think they would get so bellicose…"

"It, It is okay, Machina."

As she couldn't watch any longer, Luna hastily made a follow up.

"Actually, Shinobu-san and Father get along really well. They were a bit harsh to each others, but I believe that was just their idea of a joke. Am I right, Father?"

"It's not a joke. It was the pure truth. I have no intentions to get along with such a scoundrel."

"Father, Shinobu-san is cool. What did you say just know?"

"…I said he got a rocking pair of eyes."

A- Apparently not even the Old man could go against Luna. Well, I could understand. Luna shifted her gaze to me with a smile while emitting a kind of oppressing aura.

"Shinobu-san, you were joking too, right?"

"Ah, yes, I was."

"Please get along with my father."

"Actually, I quite respect him."

"Shinobu-san, sit."

"Woof— wait, what are you making me do so casually! I carelessly did… Uhm, could you stop petting my head? Ah, as I was saying, don't cling to me either!"

After being made a bit fun of by Luna, I sat down on the sofa with a wry smile, whereupon

"…You might be henpecked too."

As the Old man himself was henpecked too, he told me somewhat sympathizing words while he sat down besides me.

"You can come to me for advice anytime, okay?"

"Well then… wanna exchange cell phone numbers?"

"Sure."

Nodding tolerant, the Old man took out a bright red cell phone.

"Well, I know I brought it up, but why do you even have a cell phone?"

"I don't know about it myself, but apparently you can get a signal close to the barrier between our worlds, so my familiars forced it onto me."

Replying so with a sullen face, the Old man operated the cell phone skilled.

"Okay, I'll transmit per infra-red."

Considering it was forced onto him, he was quite skilled with it.

For now I exchanged numbers with him, whereupon everyone then followed my lead and started to chit-chat brightly while drinking the tea Luna made…

During that, Elni waved her hand with a smile to an empty space, which bothered me quite a lot, but I was a bit scared and ignored it.

The Old man didn't talk much, but he properly nodded agreeing to everyone's story and sometimes he showed a faint smile, so he seemed somewhat pleased.

On the other hand, Machina showed an awkward smile the whole time while contributing to the conversation and the Old man must have noticed that too. In the moment the chit-chat paused abruptly, the Old man showed a bit of hesitation, then faced Machina and quietly started to talk.

"Machina, I plan to stay in the human world for a while, but how's your packing going? How far along are you?"

"…Packing? For what?"

When Nazuna interjected puzzled, the Old man sighed with "So Machina didn't tell you…" and continued with a somewhat heavy tone.

"Her lifestyle here in the human world is over now. I'll take Machina back with me to the demon realm. Machina was supposed to know about that. I heard she's attending a human school, but just leave the necessary steps to my familiars. If needed, we can erase their memo—"

"W- Wait a second, Bram-san!"

The Old man's tone sounded as if it was already decided. While agitation spread in my chest and we all, except Elni, stiffened our expressions, Nazuna raised a voice without delay. Then she slowly shifted her with worry flickering eyes towards Machina.

"Machina-chan, you're going back to the demon realm? That's not true, right?"

"I…"

Incredible stuck for words, Machina bit her lips and trembled her body, whereupon the Old man informed us sober, as to draw on her words.

"Living in the human world doesn't suit Machina. It's wiser to bring her back at once. That'll be best for her."

"…Says who? You? Or Machina-chan?"

"Me. Is there a problem?"

Along with a low voice, the Old man sharpened the glint in his eyes, but

"That's just wrong. Why are you deciding on your own that living here doesn't suit her?"

Nazuna replied denying outright while looking the Old man straight into the eyes.

"Everyone at school wants Machina-chan to be the student president. Machina-chan is really kind, so everyone adores her. Like that she can easily become the student president and manage her life here perfectly enough too."

"…The student president?"

As he didn't understand the term, the Old man frowned faintly, whereupon Luna timidly interjected and explained about the student council election. Then the Old man leaked a faint sigh again.

"Sounds more like they pushed it onto her, instead of recommending it.

There’s no meaning in running for such an election. Even if she gets elected, it’ll just end pointless. I don’t believe she could become that student president thing.”

“You’re her father, aren’t you Bram-san? Why are you saying that? Machina-chan can be the student president! If you’re her father, try to understand her better!”

“I said it’s pointless precisely because I understand her. Machina doesn’t think well of humans. Neither do I. There’s no way someone like that could stand above humans. She’ll just get betrayed and hurt again.”

“…I don’t like your way of thinking, Bram-san.”

Not averting her eyes from the Old man at all, Nazuna made her tone stricter.

“Certainly, she’ll experience pain. But even more so, there should be a lot of fun too! Besides, I’ll never betray Machina-chan! I love her after all!”

Faintly dampening her big eyes,

“I’m sure there will be others there for her that feel the same as I! Once she becomes the student president, a lot of people will surely adore her! So, stop saying sad things and don’t take Machina-chan away…”

Nazuna revealed her feelings with a strong tone, even while coming close to tears, whereupon

“…You probably have a point. I’ll reconsider it.”

the Old man looked away from Nazuna and faced Machina with “But,”.

“Only if you actually become the student president, that is. I’ll wait until the election is over.”

the Old man looked up the ceiling a bit while saying so, then suddenly softened his tone.

"Machina, the aura here resembles that house."

"…Yeah. It really does resemble the house mother liked."

The Old man's words that sounded like a monologue.

Replying to it lovingly, yet somewhat sad, Machina clenched her fist a bit. In regards, the Old man shifted his gaze back to Machina, then

"I'll give you some more time. Try to come up with an answer."

Declaring so with a soft tone, he slowly stood up and headed for the door of the living room.

Usually I might have asked where he was going. But, for some reason I was concerned about their exchange just now, so I just followed his movements with my eyes, whereupon

"Nanjou, come with me for a bit."

the Old man suddenly looked at me and jerked his chin towards the hallway.

He must have wanted to talk alone with me. For now I put my thoughts on hold. Shortly replying with "Okay", I left the living room, which had a somewhat heavy silence, together with the Old man.

There even Elni came out of the living room, so I tilted my head a bit puzzled.

"What's up, Elni? Need something?"

"I'll have a talk with Satya."

"…Satya?"

"Bram's wife. Right now she's Bram's guardian spirit. Today she's with him too, you know? You guys probably can't see her, but I'm a Goddess. I can even talk to her."

Reminded me, quite a while ago, when the Old man tried to take Luna back with him, Elni said something about a guardian spirit being attached to the Old man.

When I remembered that, Elni quickly went up the stairs, as to talk with Satya-san, and having heard our conversation, the Old man

"Satya, don't say anything unnecessary."

softly called out to his wife he couldn't see himself, then went out the front door together with me and stopped before our car shed. Taking out cigarettes from his pockets, he held them out to me for whatever reason.

"Want one?"

“No, I stopped smoking as a kid. When I tried to smoke three cigarettes of my father for the first time, I thought it would die from the pain. Ever since I have been clean.”

“…You’ll lose Luna’s grace when you joke around too much.”

“Harsh words. But I don’t think offering cigarettes to a minor is any better.”

“You look like you enjoy alcohol and cigarettes, so I said something out of place.”

While speaking out something rude, the Old man lit a cigarette and quietly puffed it. That behaviour became kind of irritating and I silently watched him for a while, but suddenly remembering a certain something, I shifted my gaze towards his arms.

“…Today you got both your arms. Last time you said something about restraining your powers and left your left arm in the demon realm, didn’t you?”

“It’s same now. My left arm is in the demon realm. This arm is nothing but a mimicry from my familiar.”

“Hee, mimicry. Such a handy devil. Could it be, you’re receiving power from that familiar? Your face looks like a vampire’s like always, but compared to before, I think you got a better face colour?”

“…Though it irritates me, you’re quite perceiving. Just like you said, I’m getting power from my familiar. I had time to spare for preparations this time. I let my familiar mimic the arm as a counter-measure against exorcists.”

The Old man answered with a bitter face, whereas I questioned further.

“But isn’t it a lot of a burden for your familiar?”

“Of course. But then, I was against it. In the end, my familiar had it’s will. It might be better to take in some food soon to decrease the burden on my familiar.”

“Take in? Are you going to suck my blood? I think mine is quite runny.”

“…Stop it. If I were to suck your blood, it would instantly kill my familiar.”

It was a cruel remark, but I somehow understood that it was a joke. The Old man made a faint smile with “You’re one weird human”, blew out some smoke and explained.

"Low class devils like familiars, Hybrid devils like Machina or ex-humans like Luna can retrieve strength from normal food without having to suck the blood or life-force of humans. You don't need to worry about it. But I appreciate at least your consideration."

"When it gets bad, I don't mind if you appreciate my blood too and not just my consideration. I don't know much about familiars, but how is it for you, Old man? You can't eat our food?"

"For now, it's impossible. My body would need a few years to adapt to the human world. But the exorcists in this country are out-standing. I don't think they would be so naïve to leave me alone for years, but… you're asking a lot of questions. You're interested about us?"

"For one thing, Luna and Machina are devils. I would like to know about my family."

"Family, huh…"

After blowing out smoke again, the Old man said isolated.

"Your sister, Nazucat, was it?"

"It's Nazuna. Na-zu-na. Don't call her Nazucat. It couldn't suit you less."

When I gave a retort as it might be expected, the Old man faintly smiled with "Right" and slowly chased the rising smoke with his eyes.

"At first I couldn't believe that she was blood-related to you. If anything, I would say she resembles Machina in her childhood. but…"

Faintly softening his expression, the Old man continued quietly.

"She really is your sister. A straightforward girl with a strong heart. To be honest, I was surprised that she, instead of you, flared up at me."

"Thanks to that, I had no time to shine. Well, as her brother, I'm proud though."

Everything that I wanted to say was said by Nazuna in my stead. When I faintly smiled and gave an agreeable response, the Old man got an unusual soft tone.

"It seems that she thinks of Machina as a 'human'. When I'm here, it really reminds me of when Satya, my wife was still alive. It must be the same for Machina. But I know her. Even while she wishes to stay here, in time it'll be unbearable for her."

"…What do you mean?"

It was quite the implicating remark. I interjected doubtful, but the Old man didn't answer my question in the end. Pressing his cigarette into his portable ashtray, the Old man slowly looked at me after a short interval.

"Nanjou, I don't mind leaving Luna to you. She's a strong girl. Even without my help, she can live in the human world if she has you. But Machina is different."

Breathing out a bit, the Old man filled his expression and tone with bitterness.

"She's really weak. She acted spoiled to Satya and relied on Luna after Satya died. Machina always continued to fawn on someone. She's not strong enough to live with humans. I don't mind waiting for a while longer, but in time I plan to take her back to the demon realm."

"…Regardless of Machina's will?"

"If you're against it, try to stop me."

Smirking somewhat challenging, the Old man looked into my eyes.

"That said, I don't believe you can't stop my current self. It's different from before. As long as my familiar mimics my arm, you have no chance of victory."

"Might be. But in other words, if I beat you, Machina doesn't have to go back to the demon realm, right? I'll train myself properly until I have to face you."

"If that's what you want, be prepared. You should have your chance right after these elections ends. I really don't believe that Machina will become the student president."

"…I don't need to be prepared at this time."

Shaking my head lightly, I declared quietly.

"You'll reconsider once Machina becomes the student president, right? You might just have said that on the spot, but I believe Machina will be elected. And you'll wait during the time she's president, right?"

"Yes, if that's what Machina wishes for. But nothing will change by your endeavour. One day Machina will return to the demon realm by herself. I'm merely offering her an opportunity, to come home before she gets hurt deeply."

"…Machina will return by herself?"

"Because she's really weak and incredible kind."

Saying profound words and turning his back to me, the Old man walked out on the street like that.

“Hey, where are you going? You’re leaving already?”

“My stay will only unsettle Machina. Moreover, your house is too happy-go-lucky and there’s a high chance that exorcists will find me. I don’t want to cause you any troubles.”

Replying somewhat considerate, the Old man quickly left.

I wanted to stop him right away, but it was unlikely he would comply, given the state with the exorcists. After watching him off, I sighed and returned to the living room…

* * *

Due to the Old man’s visit, time went by somewhat awkward after that. Also, my mother was still out and contacted Luna on her cell phone that she would be late due to work, so her seat at the dinner table was empty. Machina seemingly was thinking about something absent-minded and even now the words “I’ll run in the student council election” wouldn’t come out of her mouth.

Everyone was being considerate to Machina and didn’t ask her about the election unreasonable. When we finished dinner, it seemed that my mother finally returned home. Hearing the “I’m home” from a familiar voice, I headed for the front door, whereupon there was a woman with sharply chiselled features.

Due to her youthful face and skin that could pass her off as in her 20s, she was often mistaken has my older sister, but she was Nanjou Tomoe, my mother.

“Welcome home, Mom. For now, hand over the souvenirs. I want a desert after dinner.”

“I’m home, Shinobu. The souvenir is my right fist. You can eat it in right here.”

“…Looks like it would give me the gripes, so I pass.”

Some people might consider it a reward, but I wasn’t into it, so I declined discreet, whereupon my mother opened her mouth remembering.

"Reminds me, Shinobu, I heard from Luna-chan on the phone that her and Machina-chan's father, Bram-san was it?, came by. I hope you didn't let your frivolous mouth run like just now."

"I was born with it, will by my answer."

"Your were born with an evil grimace. Seeing that, your father was so amused that he dropped you."

…Does that make me even human? That's quite the harsh joke, Mom. I shrugged my shoulders, stopped joking around and went up to her room while explaining the Old man's conversation from this noon to her.

Of course I avoided using the word devils, replaced "demon realm" with "overseas" and amplified the story a bit that Machina might have to return overseas with her father when she failed to get elected as the student president.

Upon that, my mother faintly knitted her eyebrows, then leaked a small sigh.

"…Does Machina-chan herself want to run in the election?"

"We don't know yet. It seems to be difficult for her."

But she might have found an answer now. I ended our conversation with "I'll go check upon her for a bit", left the room and looked for Machina, whereupon I could hear talking voices from behind the slightly opened living room door.

When I peeked in my head curiously, there were Nazuna and Machina in the living room.

For some reason their expressions were both stiff and it was an atmosphere that me hesitate to carelessly call out to them. Amidst that, Nazuna timidly leaked a small voice.

"Hey Machina-chan, why didn't you tell us before Bram-san came by? That you might go back to the demon realm…"

"I guess, you're angry?"

More likely she was sad instead of angry. When tears dwelled up in Nazuna's eyes and she shook her head, Machina looked down and dropped her voice.

"I'm sorry. I didn't want to worry you unnecessarily."

"…You're allowed make me worry, you know?"

The somewhat tear filled voice sounded rather strongly.

"You're already part of our family. I'll accept any troubles from you, so be more open about it. It might be selfish, but I want to stay with you forever. I don't want you… to go back to the demon realm…"

"I won't go back."

Faintly trembling her voice, Machina gently pulled Nazuna closer into an embrace after a short hesitation.

"I want to be together with all of you too. I want to stay at your side like this. I want to run in the election too. I'll get elected for sure and triumph of my father, then stay here forever…"

While her voice trembled even greater, Machina tightly embraced Nazuna and dearly petted her head. Nazuna entwined her arms tightly around Machina's back as well and like that they kept a passionate embrace.

I hadn't intended to eavesdrop, but… once again Nazuna took the spotlight away from me. But I didn't really regret it and smiled naturally while waiting for the right timing to enter the living room, but

"…Uhm, girls? Can I come in any time soon?"

their embrace lasted unexpected long, so I couldn't wait anymore and called out to them.

"I have been waiting for a while now, but how long are you going to make out? It makes it kind of difficult to come in."

"W- We're not really making out. It's just some physical contact. Don't mind us and just come in."

Even while flushing her cheeks, Machina still embraced Nazuna. In regards, Nazuna leaked a wry smile somewhat helpless. Judging from the situation, it appeared that it surprisingly was Machina, who didn't want to let go, and not Nazuna. A bit surprised, I lowered my head to them a bit.

"Sorry. I feel bad about it, but I overheard your conversation."

Raising my head while apologizing, I looked at Machina with a smile.

"But I see that you finally made up your mind about the election."

"Yes, I plan to do all I can."

She nodded firmly, but her expression was somewhat unconfident and she still embraced Nazuna unchanged. Softly resting my palm on her head, I declared gentle.

"I'll help with the election. Let's talk to Hijiri and the others to get their help too. I'll give them a call. Also…"

While petting Machina's head, I brightened my smile and continued.

"You can hug me too, not just Nazuna, you know?"

"Really? Then— no, wait! Y- You just want to tease me again anyway! I appreciate the help for the election, but stop the weird jokes. Besides, you're a pervert, Shinobu, so I wouldn't want to anyway. I'm fine with Nazuna. Get my sister to hug you or so."

"…Then I'll go look for Luna."

I was rejected by Machina. When I got out into the hallway and headed for the stairs a bit depressed, Nazuna peeked her head out of the living room, as the hug was Machina was over.

For some reason she approached me with a clouded expression.

"Something wrong?"

"Yeah, Machina-chan was a bit weird…"

Nodding infirm, Nazuna grabbed the sleeve of my clothes worried.

"When she hugged me earlier, I think she was trembling a bit. I can't put it into words, but I got a bit worried… Is Machina-chan okay?"

"I don't know either. Machina rarely speaks about herself."

Same as Nazuna, worry still remained in my chest. It wasn't like I perfectly understood Machina's feelings. She had pondered about the election the whole time.

"But you said it earlier. She's part of our family. Even if she doesn't tell us anything, we just have to do what we can by ourselves when we're worried. Meddling in affairs is typical for families. Still, a fee is in order."

"…Taking a fee even though we're family?"

"Nothing wrong in asking for a compensation from a family member. I only act for that. After all, just like you, Machina is… really cute when she smiles. I'll give my best, so that I get to see that smile a lot."

"In other words, Machina's smile is the fee! You're really amazing, Brother! So cool! A wonderful lady-killer!"

"Wh- Where did you learn the word lady-killer…"

I had put on airs a bit, but suddenly I became bashful.

Nazuna clung to me with sparkling eyes. Pushing away my little sister, "Anyway, I know you're worried, but for now we can only do what we can. How about you go hug Machina again for the time begin? Cheer her up with a passionate embrace."

When I gave her these distracting words, her earlier depressed expression vanished. Nazuna saluted with a "Meow!" and a smile. Then she returned to the living room without delay and full of energy.

After seeing her off, I went to my own room and took out my cell phone.

…Now then, I should do what I can do.

Opening the address book of my phone, my eyes stopped at the name Gogyou Hijiri.

She was my classmate and a precious friend. I was sure that she would help with the election campaign too. While remembering her dignified profile, I operated my cell phone and called her.

After a few call signs then,

"H- Hello? What's up, Shinobu-kun?"

"Yo, Hijiri. I want to talk about something, do you have time right now?"

"Of course. What is it? It's rare for you to call me."

Hijiri incited her voice happily. Hearing that voice made me smile for some reason. But I tried to get to the issue at hand right away, whereupon

"Ah, sorry, Shinobu-kun. Kaoru-san is next to me right now and it seems she wants to listen. Would that be al— wait, Kaoru-san! You can bring your face closer, but no kisses!"

As Kaorun aka Kaoru did something, Hijiri's flustered voice reached my ear.

"Ehm, Hijiri? I don't really mind that Kaorun is there, but I'm trying to tell you something serious. I want Kaorun to listen properly as much as possible too."

With that as the prologue, I summarizing explained about the Old man's visit and that Machina would run in the student council election after accepting the Old man's conditions.

During that Hijiri gave sympathizing agreeable responses like "Sounds though" and when I brought up the election,

"I get it. Of course I'll help out with the campaign too. You'll join in too, right Kaoru-san?”

“Please leave it to me. I will support Machina with all my strength. I believe that once Machina gets instituted as the student president, I will be left off the hook should I get caught sneaking into the school.”

Hijiri and Kaorun both gave instant answers. That said, Kaorun’s was filled with self-interest, but she was probably joking. She corrected her tone and continued.

“Well then Shinobu-sama, let us promptly hold a meeting tomorrow. Meanwhile I will think of some ideas. Please come over here with Machina tomorrow after school.”

“Okay, great. Thanks. Until tomorrow, then.”

“Ah, please wait, Shinobu-sama.”

As the phone switched over from Hijiri, Kaorun’s voice got a bit louder.

“If possible, could we talk for a bit longer?”

“…Talk? About what?”

“I do not have a particular topic, but please let me hear some wonderful words for now. Some sweet words that ease my tired heart please.”

“—Cheers to the reflection in your eyes of myself.”

“Okay, narcissistic Shinobu-sama, I was hoping for more romantic words, rather than that rip-off remark. Hijiri-chan is hoping for it as well. Take-two.”

“—I’ll speak these words for the first time. And I’ll never say it again. This love is a once in a lifetime love. I love you so much, Hijiri, Kaoru.”

When I tried quoting some sentences I read in a some book to meet her request, there was an unexpected agitated voice beyond the phone.

“I, I meant it as a little joke, but that had quite an impact. Somehow my whole chest is getting hot… Oh? Hijiri-chan? Your face is bright red. Are you okay?”

“…I also love you so much, Shinobu-kun.”

“H- Hijiri-chan? Just now that was kind of overdoing it, you know? It certainly was fantastic, but it was just a joke. You cannot take it all too serious, okay?”

“I think I’m in heaven.”

“Uhm, I would appreciate it if you could listen to me…”

While Hijiri’s spellbound voice reached my ear, my cheeks became hot for some reason. When I scratched my head lightly and mumbled, my earlobe picked up Kaorun's somewhat flustered voice.

"Shinobu-sama, Hijiri-chan will not come back from her dream world. Since it has come to this, please make it a sweet dream for her. I ask you to say one more fantastic remark."

"Sorry, but I'm busy. This is it for tonight. Kiss and good-bye."

"…The kiss and good-bye just ruined everything. Well, Hijiri-chan though is closing her dignified eyes, as she is imagining a kiss with you, and puckering her well-formed light pink lips— Ah, that hurts, Hijiri-chan! Forgive me for saying something unnecessary! I apologize, so please forgive me!"

They seemed to dispute a bit, but I cut the call by leaving behind the words "See you".

Okay, Hijiri and Kaorun were on board. Now I should research a bit about the student council election. I started up my computer and browsed the internet. I then kept watching my computer screen for while, but before I noticed it, quite the time had passed.

Suddenly there was a reserved knock on my door.

"I am sorry to bother you when you are busy, Shinobu-san, but could you go take your bath soon?"

A soft voice reached my ears and Luna quietly stood next to me.

But I made a vague response with "Mm", whereupon she brought her graceful face closer, then smiled roguish and blew a sweet breathing with "Fuh" into my ear.

"It is late already, so please hurry up, okay?"

"M- Mhm."

While I was quite agitated at heart, I shifted my eyes towards the computer screen, whereupon Luna put her supple arms around my shoulder and her voluptuous big breasts pressed onto me. Moreover her light pink lips slowly drew closer, lightly placing a kiss on my ear.

"I cannot do the laundry when you do not take your bath, Shinobu-san. You are the last one, you know? It is cold tonight, so please warm up your body in the bath, okay?"

"Mm…"

"Geez, Shinobu-san, when you keep giving half-hearted replies, I will bite you."

Contrary to her threatening words, Luna's tone was really gentle and somewhat bewitching.

…But where was she going to bite me?

My interest was piqued a bit, so I dared to go through with a half-hearted reply, whereupon

"Mm… *kiss*… Are you sure? I will really bite you."

After repeating light kisses that were like pecks, Luna took my earlobe between her round lips. I felt the soft sensation of her lips and her hot breathing on my ear. With my heart in turmoil by that, I remained silent, whereupon she started to lick my ear rolling with the tip of her tongue.

I, It certainly might be better to stop her now.

Even while thinking so, no voice to stop her left my mouth and Luna didn't stop her movements while smiling, kissing my neck charming next after my ear.

"Well then, Shinobu-san, I am going to bite you."

After softly calling out to me, Luna let her sweet lips wander over my neck caressing and pressed them strongly onto it, alluringly moving the tip of her tongue.

"Mm… *kiss*… *bite*…"

While making sensational slurping sounds, she leaked a bewitching moan and sucked onto my neck, starting to play-bite it ecstatically.

"*bite*… Shinobu-san… Please take your bath… *kiss*…"

"To be honest, I couldn't care less about the bath now."

"That is not good… Mm… You have school tomorrow after all…"

With a still gentle voice, Luna continued her play-biting and reminded me.

But I just couldn't think about a bath right now. Not only her beautiful lips, but even her voluminous breasts pressed onto my body. Every time Luna moved, her breasts glued to my body changed shaped seductively and bounced softly to show off their great elasticity.

My neck gradually grew numb and shivered stronger. When my half-hearted reply started to change into "Mm" moans, Luna sparkled her eyes happily, as she noticed my reaction.

"Fufu, it feels good for you too, mh? Then I will continue further."

"Ah, no, ehm…"

The words to stop her were on the very tip of my tongue. But I couldn't bring them to leave my mouth after all and as Luna had forgotten her initial objective, she intensified her play-biting.

But it didn't hurt at all. It was just a pleasant simulation. Luna might have just played around at first, but sometimes she showed a fascinated expression and I felt my reasoning slowly melting away, whereupon

"Ah…"

Luna suddenly raised a small voice and regretfully got away from me right afterwards. For some reason she lowered her head with a sorry expression.

"I am sorry, Shinobu-san. I unconsciously became engrossed…and gave you a kiss mark."

"…I, I don't really mind. I'll boast about it to the guys at school."

Somehow behaving composed without getting flustered or agitated, I desperately clad myself with serenity, whereupon Luna lowered her voluminous breasts in relief, as she realized that I wasn't angry.

"I am really sorry. I will be more careful next time. Anyway, what were you doing, Shinobu-san?"

Shaking her dazzling blonde hair, her lovely profile drew closer and Luna peeked wondering at the computer screen, which closed the distance between us even more and her breathing was about to touch me. Following, her hair softly brushed my ear, whereupon a sweet fragrance tickled my nasal cavities and my heartbeat accelerated while Luna smiled faintly and asked quietly.

"You were looking into the student council election."

"Yeah, I want Machina to get elected no matter what."

When I hid my agitation again and nodded firmly, Luna brightened her smile and narrowed her eyes softly.

"Machina and Nazuna-chan told me about the election earlier. Hearing it made me so happy that I inadvertently hugged onto Machina."

With a still quiet tone, Luna softly spun her words.

"Machina is a really kind girl, so I believe she had troubles deciding about going back to the demon realm the whole time. But when she is trying her best to stay with everyone…"

Letting her voice overflow with warmth, Luna filled her words with her feelings.

“I am Machina’s older sister after all. I am ready to do anything for her. Please come to me when you need something, Shinobu-san.”

“Your support is reassuring. Thanks.”

Luna smiled brightly and lovely. It made me once more realize how much she loved Machina. But even while I gave Luna back a smile, I suddenly remembered.

…If I remembered correctly, the Old man said stuff like “Machina will return to the demon world by herself” and “She’s really weak and incredible kind”. And Luna just told me that “Machina is a really kind girl, so I believe she had troubles deciding about going back to the demon realm the whole time”.

But how was Machina’s kindness related to her return to the demon realm?

Luna might know something about it. But I shouldn’t ask that of her, but from Machina herself.

Standing up with the decision, I switched my thoughts to something cheerful.

“Okay, about time I get into the bath.”

“If you like, I can wash your back?”

“Oh? Could it be you want to see my sexy body?”

“I, I do!”

“—Pft!”

I wanted to tease her a bit, but I inadvertently snorted on the unbelievable counter. But while wiping my mouth, I undauntedly continued the joke.

“D- Don’t lie. Actually you just want to show off your naughty body to me, right?”

“…Yes. Since it is you, I want you to see it.”

Y- Yet another powerful counter. Luna fidgeted her knees against each other while turning bright red. To be frank, I was quite agitated and opened my mouth timidly.

“Uhm, Luna-san? What’s up with you? Do you like exhibition play after all?”

“Ex- Exhibition play? Noo! And what you mean with after all! Please stop it!”

After getting red up to her ears and denying it, now Luna opened her mouth timidly.

“Well, Tomoe-san told me that if I asked you more boldly than usual, you would take a bath together with me. But I must have made a mistake…”

“Y- You did nothing wrong, Luna. I’m going to see my mom for a bit.”

To Lecture her for about an hour. What advices was my mother giving her when she didn’t even consider my feelings. Luna already carelessly gave me a kiss mark. If I were to take a bath together with her, my reasoning might not last and I would forget myself.

While perking up my shoulders, I swiftly left my room and immediately headed for my mother’s room, but midway I changed my direction. No matter what I said, I would surely just get teased. And I was a bit scared. Therefore I quickly gave up on the lecture and decided to head to the bath, like Luna had urged me to, to ease my today’s exhaustion. By the way, after getting out of the bath, I still continued to research about the election on the internet and it was past midnight when I went to sleep…

Chapter 02: Following in the Steps of her Inspiration

The scent of perfume sweetly brushed the tip of my nose. Well-formed beautiful breasts rich on elasticity pressed onto my back. When I shifted my gaze to the side, I could confirm brilliant chiselled facial features. For some time now, Kaorun was faintly smiling while tightly hugging onto my back for some reason.

But, how long would this pleasant hug continue?

It was evening after school ended. Like we had agreed on yesterday over the phone, Hijiri and Kaorun offered the living room in their house for our meeting. To discuss the election campaign there, Machina and I went home once, then headed over to Hijiri’s house.

But whatever she might be thinking, Kaorun greeted us with her usual maid clothes.

At the entrance hall she had clung onto my back and I didn't bother to retort, since it was too troublesome, but even after I sat down in the broad living room, she was still clinging to my back even now.

Two soft breasts. An aromatic and pleasant scent. The continuous sensation of her warm body made me run out of patience and I interjected.

"…I can't focus on the meeting like this. How long are you going to stay like this? Or rather, what are you even doing?"

"Replenishing my energy. Please do not mind me and start with the meeting."

Don't ask for the impossible while leaning that charming body onto me.

Seeking help, I threw a glance at the cool beauty with dignified features, Hijiri, who gave off a gorgeous aura as always.

But contrary to Machina, who had a weary expression, Hijiri just smiled a bit.

"Shinobu-kun, Kaoru-san is tired from various things. Please allow it for a bit longer."

"Tired? Oh, she couldn't sleep, since she was thinking of me."

"Ehm, she's not like me… wait, no. Remember, I talked you before that we hiring a new maid. So she's kinda busy with these preparations lately. Besides, it seems she researched about the election until late at night yesterday."

A new maid and researching the election, huh. Reminded me, the current head of the Gogyou Household, Sougo-san decided to hire a new maid so that Kaorun could devote herself to studying for the entrance exam after it turned out that she would be able to attend university together with Hijiri.

Hijiri said something quite concerning during her sentence, but I dared to ignore it by just saying "I see" while remembering the stuff about the new maid, whereupon Kaorun rested her chin on my shoulder and gave a joking warning.

"Shinobu-sama, the new maid is a really adorable girl. I am sure she will come to live in this house in the near future, but please do not lay your hands on her.”

“I can’t promise that.”

“Sh- Shinobu-sama, you natural gigolo!”

When I replied joking, Kaorun playfully grinded her chin onto my shoulder.

…It felt a bit nice. After all, her round breasts innocently trembled stimulating on my back with every movement from her, transmitting an indescribable softness and elasticity.

But keeping my cool eagerly, I softly called out to Kaorun.

“I see that you worked hard for Machina’s sake. Even though you were tired from the stuff with the new maid, you looked into the election until late at night too, right?”

“Exactly. I really worked hard, so please give me a reward. For now, could you let me hear some sweet words? I expect some really romantic ones that soothe my tired heart.”

It was a similar request to the one on the phone yesterday, but I decided to respond suited.

“—I want to give up everything and caress.”

“Caress me? I understand.”

“After caressing you, I want to toss you aside.”

“Muh, how rude. The God of romance will not be pleased at this. I will present you a kiss now, so please accept it and give me a wonderful remark.”

“J- Just how desperate are you for sweet words— hey, wait! What’re you doing! Don’t try to kiss me for real!”

While I enjoyed exchanging jokes with Kaorun like that, Machina made a face like she wanted to say something, but Hijiri quietly started talking by giving me a side-glance.

“Machina-san, they’ll stop their jokes soon enough and then they’ll surely participate seriously in the meeting after having played around. For now, let’s start the meeting with just the two of us at least.”

“…So you got used to it too, Hijiri.”

Machina showed a wry smile and nodded, then she started the meeting together with Hijiri with the table between them while ignoring us.

Watching over these two, Kaorun dropped her voice faintly.

"They will not give us a retort."

"Our disputes might already be an everyday occurrence."

"It would be more precise to call it mannerism. A moderate stimulation is essential for our everyday life. Shinobu-sama, would you like to try a slightly radical and daring approach now to attain that stimulation?"

"…I believe a nonchalant life is the greatest treasure ever. Therefore I don't call for radical and daring stimulations. Sorry, but I decline."

"Please do not sound so callously. Just be yourself, Shinobu-sama, and casually do as you please for a stimulation. Please make it dirty. How about we move to the bed?"

"But keep the lights off, okay? In the faint twilight, I want gaze at your heart alone— as if! Why do you look a bit happy? Don't touch me with your dirty fingers! Ah, hey. I said no! Stop! Stop it, Kaoru-san!"

I inadvertently lapsed into respective speech and urged her to stop, but Kaorun didn't stop at all. She happily stroked my cheek with her slender fingertips and while my protesting voice echoed ineffective, she brought her light red lips closer to me, lightly pressing them onto my neck.

…This wasn't good. I had hid it with the collar of my clothes, but at this rate she would find the kiss mark that Luna gave me last night. While I hastily tried to get Kaorun off me, Hijiri and Machina gradually started to shiver their bodies to hold in something, as they were observing my situation.

"Oh my? A kiss mark on your neck…"

The moment Kaorun isolated said so, they surely lost their patience. Hijiri and Machina stood up with attitude and approached Kaorun together, calling out to her.

"K- Kaoru-san! What're you doing! Hurry up and get away from Shinobu-kun! It's not fair for you alone to do something so enviable!"

"Right! Just like Hijiri said, it's not fair, Kaoru… wait, Hijiri? Aren't these your true feelings? Should you be saying that?"

"Aw…"

"S- Sorry, I said something unnecessary. I didn't thought you would turn bright red like that."

"…It's fine. I can't make physical contact with Shinobu-kun like Luna-san or Kaoru-san, so I'm really envious. Same goes for you, doesn't it

Machina?”

“Yes, I can’t kiss or hug Shinobu like my sister, can’t get petted on the head like Nazuna, nor can I take a bath together with— wait, I’m not like you! Don’t make me say weird things too, Hijiri! Just to tell you, that weren’t my true feelings!”

“Is, Is that so? For that it was rather specific though…”

“—Okay, Hijiri-chan, Machina, over there! This is not the time to be doing that! We have troubles!”

Calling them to a stop with a somewhat shrill voice, Kaorun pointed at my neck sharply.

“This kiss mark is not from me! It has already been on his neck before I could give him one! Just what is going on here, Shinobu-sama!”

“Yeah, it was forced onto me last night by a roguish lady. I wanted to casually play around for some stimulation, but fell for her innocent lips.”

The moment I cracked such a joke, Hijiri, Machina and Kaorun stiffened their expressions all at once.

“…So someone could force a kiss mark onto Shinobu-kun. How enviab— *cough* Using force isn’t good after all. You should have reprimanded her.”

“That’s for sure. I can’t stand coercive ways either.”

“Shinobu-sama, I am not really one to say as I tried to give you a kiss mark as well, but just who was it that forced it onto you?”

“The natural erotic big sister.”

When I honestly gave an instant reply, Hijiri and Kaorun turned around as soon as hearing my answer,

“I’m sorry, Kaoru-san, for suspecting you about the kiss mark…”

“No problem, Hijiri-chan. After all you believed me when I told a lie the other day. Well, that aside, it is about time that I participate in the meeting as well.”

behaving as if nothing had happened, the two of them made their way to the table of the living room.

Feeling a bit doubtful, I tried calling out to Machina, who remained here.

“Hey, shouldn’t Luna get a little scolding?”

“That’s impossible. We‘re up against my sister. I can’t tell her off.”

Smiling a little bit sadly, Machina quickly went after Hijiri and Kaorun.

Even while I still considered it doubtful, I got to the table like the girls and this time we started the meeting seriously, whereupon Kaorun brought in a huge whiteboard into the living room from wherever and took lead of the meeting.

“Now then, the results of my research from during my breaks of work are that there are currently five people including Machina running for the position of the student council, though it has not officially been announced yet.”

“…Five even, huh. That’s much.”

“Because the organisation called student council at your high school seems to hold some level of power.”

As to respond to my surprised outburst, Kaorun wrote “4 Rival Candidates” on the whiteboard.

“Most likely there are some people amongst the candidates that think something on the lines of ‘Guehehe, I’ll gain power and have my way’ or ‘I’ll earn some back channels and enter a first-rate university’. I will not speak bad about it, but…”

Slowly stopping her words, Kaorun made her tone somewhat decisive.

“I hardly believe that Machina will loose to such opponents.”

“In other words, as long as they don’t pull any dirty tricks, Machina can get elected easily?”

“Not long ago that would have been the case. But as of now, the situation has changed.”

“…It changed?”

“What do you mean?”

When I and Machina tilted our heads all alike, Hijiri interjected reserved.

“Ehm, remember how I withdraw my candidacy for the student president not long ago? It might be due to that, but it seems the current Vice-president is now running for the president position. She’s experienced with the elections and is popular, so I don’t think she’ll let us win so easily.”

“…We can’t lump her together with the other candidates, huh.”

Speaking of, previously Hijiri was asked by the current student president to succeed the position. But due to her job as an exorcist and some troubles with me, the burden increased on her while she prepared for the election and she collapsed once at school.

Afterwards we reconciled and she prioritized her work and spending time with me, so in the end she withdrew from the election.

But, like Hijiri had said, her withdrawal might have consequences.

After all Hijiri was very popular. Her election would have been pretty much a given.

But now that she withdraw, the number of candidates increased, since they thought they have a chance now, and like Kaorun had said, it wasn’t all that unbelievable that amongst them were some people who were after the power or back channels of the president position.

Maybe the current Vice-President decided to run, because she couldn’t tolerate that?

While making such a guess, I crossed my arms and leaked a sigh at heart.

…Either way it would be a difficult election. Machina must have thought of the same. She showed a bit of worry in her expression and when I felt the atmosphere in the room get somewhat heavy, Kaorun lightly clapped her hands as to brighten up the current atmosphere.

“The Vice-president might prove to be a formidable opponent. But I do not have the slightest intention of losing. Let us come up with a plan together to win the election.”

On her words, we all looked at each other and nodded back firmly, whereupon Kaorun faintly smiled and threw a glance at Machina with a serious expression.

“I do believe you are aware of it already, Machina, but the election campaigns finally start in a few days. First we need to promote your face during the campaign.”

“…My face?”

“Indeed. There will be students who still not know about you. At the same time we promote you, we also have to make sure that you leave a good impression on the students.”

After softly responding to Machina, Kaorun wrote “Promotion” and “Improve Impression” on the whiteboard.

“For now, let us focus on these two points. It might be the basic of basics, but greet the students at the school gate every morning without fail. We should ask your classmate for assistance on this matter. Shinobu-sama, please accompany Machina at the school gate."

"Sure. I'm weak with mornings, but leave it to me."

"Incidentally, keep your cross-dress on at that time."

"Okay, I have a trauma with cross-dressing, but leave— like hell I would say that! Why are you suddenly joking around? Please, do it seriously."

"It was not really meant as a joke. Excuse me for this, but your scary face would scare the students and turn our desired good impression into a bad one instead. To avoid that from happening, it is essential that you cross-dress."

…Regrettable I thought that she was right.

But I really hated to cross-dress. When I inadvertently leaked a sigh, Hijiri backed me up, as she couldn't endure seeing me like that.

"Kaoru-san, Shinobu-kun seems opposed to the cross-dressing, so I'll go with Machina to the school gate instead. That should be fine, right?"

"…I cannot approve of that. Your withdrawal caused troubles for the members of the student council, who had prepared for the election so far, right? Machina's rival is one of these members, the current Vice-President. It would not be favourable for you to come out in the open, Hijiri-chan."

While Hijiri dropped her shoulders from the light rebuke, Kaorun looked at me while continuing her words with "It is wiser to have you work behind the scenes, Hijiri-chan".

"Therefore, Shinobu-sama, please cross-dress for Machina's sake. Since Hijiri-chan will be working behind the scenes, I believe you are the most suitable to back up Machina."

"Well, guess so."

"Then please do us the favour and cross-dress. You are not the kind of cold-hearted person that would leave the brave, yet worried Machina all alone at the school gate, or am I wrong?"

Uncertain if she was serious or joking, Kaorun had an overly passionate tone. In regards, Machina showed a wry smile and made a reserved follow-up for me like Hijiri.

"You don't need to worry that much, Kaoru. It certainly would be reassuring to have Shinobu with me, but another classmate will help too…"

"No, I'll be with you."

Slowly reaching out my hand, I patted Machina's head.

"After all, I'm the most suited one to bring out your tricked&retort— I mean, bring out your charm. For that I'll cross-dress or whatever else."

"…The other day, they had a program about Freud's words 'A slip of tongue gives you a glimpse of a person's true feelings' on TV, you know? I think I just got a glimpse of your's from the slip just now, Shinobu. Well, it made me a bit happy…"

So she was a bit happy. I was a bit surprised… When I was thinking so, Kaorun nodded satisfied, raised her slender waist and swiftly took Hijiri and Machina's arm.

"Well then, we have covered the important points, so let us proceed with the creation of a poster next. I heard that you hang up the posters of the candidates on the school's black board. I have already prepared the camera and outfit, so let us take a picture for the poster at once."

"Kaoru-san, I'm impressed you knew about that. But what's with this hand?"

When Hijiri dropped her gaze on her held arm, Kaorun replied without hesitation.

"I concluded that it would be too embarrassing for Machina alone. So please get changed as well on this occasion, Hijiri-chan. It a chance to seduce Shinobu-sama."

"…Seduce Shinobu-kun? I, I wonder if I can pull it off."

"Of course you can. I am sure Shinobu-sama will be pleased. Please try your hardest for both Machina and Shinobu-sama."

"Yeah, okay. I'll."

Hijiri agreed relatively easily. On the other hand, Machina, held by Kaorun just like Hijiri, handed out a stop to Kaorun hastily.

"W- Wait, Hijiri! Don't fall for Kaoru's sweet talk! We're talking about Kaoru here, so she has prepared weird outfits without doubt! Besides, why even get changed? Just take a photo with the school uniform— wait, don't pull, Kaoru! Stop it, let go!"

Machina protested by swaying her legs and arms to and fro, but it was fruitless and she disappeared from the living room together with Hijiri by being dragged by Kaorun.
But well, taking a breather was important too. Resting my head with a wry smile, I decided to wait for them to return while resting my chin in my hand on the table…

Then a few minutes went by and because I stayed up late yesterday, I unconsciously was about to doze off, whereupon the door of the living room opened quietly and the girls finally returned.
But Kaorun, who had a single lens reflex camera hanging around her neck, aside, the moment my eyes fell onto Hijiri and Machina's outfits, all my sleepiness was blown away at once and I inadvertently widened my eyes greatly.
…Amazing. Their outfits were rather attractive. Their costumes were quite different from each other, but first off, Hijiri's was generally speaking a shrine maiden with a short skirt?
A snow-white short-sleeved Kimono with a pure sense of chastity. Arranged with a mini-skirt instead of the traditional red Hakama. The length of that skirt was incredible short and exposed Hijiri's beautiful thighs openly, bewitchingly emphasising her healthy and beautiful legs. I could for fall it at any time. Hijiri's own charm surely played a great role for it. The traditional Japanese trimness and an elegant charm were perfectly combined.
But in no way inferior to Hijiri, Machina's outfit had quite the impact as well.
Normally she was already showing off a Queen-like radiance anyway, yet she now wore a suggestive bondage fashion, which improved her elegant seductiveness.
A bondage wear that gave off a bewitching black brilliance.
That wear seductively highlighted Machina's bodyline, which possessed outstanding proportions. Her voluminous breasts and slender waist. Her firm thighs that peeked out of her short pants. Her elegant legs that were clad in stockings with a garter belt. All of them emitted a sex appeal that fascinated you sweetly.

Before I noticed it, I had been at a loss for words from being fascinated by Hijiri and Machina, but just how did Kaorun get the two of them to wear these daring outfits?

Suddenly returning to my senses, I tilted my head in doubt.

…Reminded me, they took quite the time to get changed, but did she persuade the two during that time? Kaorun, with still the camera around her neck, wiped her forehead like she wanted to say ‘Whew, I did it’, whereas on the other hand Hijiri and Machina each formed their red cheeks into a bright smile.

“Good, Shinobu-kun really seems to like it…”

“He’s trying to hide it, but you can see he’s grinning. Kaoru was really right.”

They whispered that to each other. Amidst that, Kaorun softly pulled out a video camera out of her pocket and for some reason started to film, holding the camera into my direction.

“Hey, Kaorun. You don’t need to film me. Stop it.”

Even while saying so, I posed with a wink, whereupon Kaorun opened her mouth with a good mood.

“This wild man with the fearless features is Nanjou Shinobu-sama. A great man, who made Hijiri-chan his lover. He likes strolls on the beach, sunsets and sexy women. Please call me if you would like to know his three sizes. And lastly, Shinobu-sama, please a word for all your fans in the nation.”

“I’ll gently embrace any fan of mine, regardless of gender. If you have troubles, come to me anytime. I’m like a convenience store, available twenty-four hours a day without rest.”

“Okay, that was the lame Shinobu-sama that does not know when to stop screwing around. But even this mischievous side of him is cute.”

While cracking an usual joke, Kaorun slowly shifted the camera towards Machina.

“Next we have the red-haired Queen, who looks fantastic in bondage fashion: Machina Liebelei Orangelo. Her special traits are Tsundere and her combination of easily getting tricked only to retort afterwards. A word from you as well on this occasion, Machina. If possible, please something that gives off the feeling of stepping onto a man’s heart with pin heels.”

“—Listen up, my cute servants. Until I say otherwise, keep your dirty mouths shut. Got it? If anyone besides me speaks, I won’t show any mercy… wait, what are you making me do! Besides, who are you calling a Qween!”

…Machina bit her tongue.

Instantly, the red-haired Queen blushed up to her ears. Her outfit and body were sexy, but looking at Machina made me smile naturally after all. After Kaorun smiled like I did, she moved the camera towards Hijiri and filmed a perfect low-angle.

“Now then, this dignified black-haired cool beauty is my own vaunted little sister, Gogyou Hijiri-chan. Currently you can see a part of her panties, but white sure is fantastic. As expected of Hijiri-chan. Please a word from you too.”

“Aw, it’s embarrassing, so stop it… Don’t look… No, don’t film me…”

Without her usual dignified brilliance, Hijiri trembled her voice with shame.

Somehow my heartbeat became strangely rapid. Hijiri grabbed the hem of her skirt tightly with both her hands and bashfully fidgeted her knees against each other. Nothing that, Kaorun suddenly approached me and held the camera out to me.

“Shinobu-sama, I will now do the photo-shooting like initially planned. I entrust the video camera to you. Please film it neatly for a keepsake.”

“I’ll make the actor shine.”

Nodding large-hearted, I directed the camera at Kaorun without delay.

“Okay, this beautiful woman with the sharp features and maid clothes is Kaorun aka Gogyou Kaorun. She’s a surprisingly shy older sister that loves jokes. On this occasion, a word from you, Kaorun.”

When I let myself get carried away with the joke, Kaorun made a blown kiss “Mm… *kiss*“ along with a bewitching pose.

“How was it? Did it excite you?”

“…I think whatever I’ll say will only hurt you. And I don’t want to hurt you.”

"An angelic smile of a devil!?"

To be honest it was quite exciting, but I kept quiet about it, since it was embarrassing.

Upon that, Kaorun quickly started to take pictures of Hijiri and Machina with her single lens reflex camera around her neck, as she didn't seem to mind it, even though she looked slightly sour.

"Well then, you two, this might be a bit sudden, but please take off all your clothes and get nak… I can tell by your expressions. You are against it. Then instead down to the underwear…. No good either, huh. I understand. Well then, could you at least strike a sexy pose?"

…I had read this negotiation method in some book before.

Highball technique, I believe? First you start with an unreasonable offer and when the other party starts to ponder, you immediately give a compromise, making the other party agree on the true offer. It was a trick to casually raise the other party's anchor.

And as they fell for that, both Hijiri and Machina readily took the demanded poses like saying "If it's just that", whereas Kaorun on the other hand set up her digital camera.

"You are both very charming, Hijiri-chan, Machina. So fantastic. Really cute."

Praising them like that, she used another negotiation method and when the two of them showed hesitation, Kaorun brought up my name with "You two, Shinobu-sama is enjoying it too" or "Shinobu-sama is fascinated by you too" and made them take daring poses.

During that, their abundant breasts were prominent on the leopardess pose generally used for gravure idols and I could look into their deep cleavages. Also, on the pose with her legs spreads their beautiful legs glittered bewitching and I was fascinated by their smooth and long legs.

Of all things, they next got on all fours, then lightly stuck out their ample bottoms into my directions while I got a fleeting and fascinating glance on the white panties under Hijiri's short skirt and pink panties under Machina's short pants.

…Too dazzling for my eyes. While I was agitated, Kaorun softly shifted her gaze towards me.

"So, Shinobu-sama, how do you currently feel?"

"Like I'm in heaven. Though I think it'll change into hell soon…"
"Rest assured, Shinobu-sama. I will accompany you to hell."
…In other words, she had no intentions to stop yet?
As it might be expected I tried to stop her, but before I could, Kaorun called out to the two girls.
"Okay, please look over here now. Listen, it is about time you take off your skirts and panties… No, I am merely joking. Well then, please raise up your bottoms a bit more. Now please shake them lightly, like you were going to seduce Shinobu-sama."
When Kaorun urged them like that, Hijiri and Machina looked at each other and were a bit hesitant, but
"Hijiri-chan, Machina. Shinobu-sama is eagerly awaiting. He is completely grinning on a rare occasion, you know? Please do your best for him."
tempted by the perverted maid, both flushed their cheeks after a short hesitation and slowly shook their waists sinuous.
Their beautiful bottoms trembled bewitching. Their ample hips followed Kaorun's instruction and started to move up and down as to seduce me. Next their movement changed to left and right, lastly drawing circles like scrubbing something.
That alone was already plenty stimulating, yet every time they moved, the short skirt and short pants gradually rolled up nevertheless, perfectly showing Hijiri's white and Machina's pink panties. Their round buttocks were in plain view now.
In this situation, the two of them flushed their cheeks even more and continued to move their waists, whereupon their snow-white bottoms rocked dirty and sweetly bounced to show off their outstanding springiness.
Ehm, personally this was like heaven to me, but… should they really be doing that for a photo-shooting? When I got a late guilty consciousness, Kaorun continued the shooting, ignorant of my feelings. Furthermore, she took out a crib sheet from her pocket and showed it to Hijiri.
"Hijiri-chan, please read this sentence now along with some sweet moaning."
Hearing that request, Hijiri damped her eyes from shame and timidly

opened her mouth.

"—P, Please make me your pet."

What an incredible impact. When I felt even my own cheeks inadvertently getting hot, Kaorun showed Machina a crib sheet too.

"This sentence is for you, Machina."

"—Tonight, do it from behind <3 LIKE HELL!"

As she returned to her senses as expected, Machina faintly raised her voice at the same time she made her tricked&retort combo.

"Give it a rest already with making us do such things, Kaoru! Sure, I was happy getting praised. And since Shinobu liked it too, I kinda got into it, but now that I think about it, there's no way we can use these for the election poster! In the first place, why are you still filming, Shinobu!"

"S- Sorry. You two were just so charming, that I unconsciously…"

"Eh? Charming? Is that so--- wait, no! You're filming again! You should stop Kaoru now, Shinobu! Hijiri, say something too!"

"…As long it makes Shinobu-kun happy, I'm fine with it. I can't seem to tell him off."

"J- Just how devoting can you get…"

Hijiri made a small troubled smile. Machina made a small sigh. As for Kaorun,

"If we make good use of the data in this digital camera and video camera, we might win the election rather easily."

Saying so isolated, she took the video camera from me, whereupon Hijiri and Machina hastily raised flustered voices.

"K- Kaoru-san! You can't! I can't show something that embarrassing to anyone besides Shinobu-kun! Please stop!"

"Right! What's wrong with your head! Hand over that digital and video camera at once! I'll erase all the data from so far!"

"P- Please, anything but erasing the data! It makes such a good keepsake!"

Along with her words, Kaorun swiftly turned her back to them and quickly escaped the living room. In regards, Hijiri and Machina chased after her while calling her to stop, leaving me all alone in the living room again.

…Would we restart the meeting when they got back?

It was about time we took this a bit more serious. We certainly overdid it a bit.

For now I started to engage in some self-criticism alone in the living room, whereupon suddenly quiet footsteps sounded and with the door opening, a man with firm features showed up.

He was Hijiri's father, Gogyou Sougo-san.

Did he come home just now? Correcting my posture, I called out to him with "Thanks for having me over", whereupon Sougo-san gave me a small nod back, then showed a sullen expression for some reason.

"Nanjou-kun, I saw Hijiri and the others in the hallway earlier, but why were they dressed like that?"

"…Juvenility, I guess. Please overlook it."

"Mhm, that's youth for you. Still, these clothes belong to my wi--- No, never mind."

How could I not mind? But I didn't mention it out of consideration, whereupon Sougo-san softened his sharp look and changed the topic.

"Reminds me, Elni is living at your house, right? How's she doing? Still at home now?"

"I think she's lying under the heated table together with my sister…"

The other day Elni had fawn on my mother with "Please", so earlier than usual the heated table was set up in our living room.

But Sougo-san should be avoiding Elni. So it was surprising that he brought up Elni by himself. I titled my head doubtfully.

"Where did that come from? It's rare for you to talk about Elni."

"Well, you know, it has gotten colder lately. I just remember that Elni doesn't like the cold. I'm going to excuse myself now, but when you come over the next time, bring Elni along if possible. I would like to have dinner with her once in a while."

"…Dinner with Elni?"

"Elni is… my precious friend, you know."

That was a real surprise. That Sougo-san thought of Elni like that…

Sougo-san smiled faintly. But his tone was somewhat depressed and his eyes were filled with a faint sadness for some reason. Also, as he still was thinking of Elni, he showed a really kind, but somewhat sad smile

when he left.
That complex expression left a strangely lasting impression in my chest…

Then I spent my time absent-minded for a while, whereupon the girls finally returned to the living room.
But as the photo shooting data had regretfully been erased, Kaorun was crying sobbing, whereas Hijiri and Machina had changed back into their original clothes.
In time then, Kaorun seemed to have overcome her depression and this time started a serious photo shooting. Once that was over, we again discussed things regarding the election and after a fruitful time, Machina and I bid our farewell to Hijiri and Kaorun with leaving the Gogyou mansion.
By the way, on that occasion Kaorun whispered "Trust be told, I managed to copy the data from just the video camera onto a memory card before it got erased, protecting it with my life. I will make a copy and present it to you next time, Shinobu-sama" near my ear, but that aside for now.
Under the setting sun, Machina and I made our way home side by side. Midway, we made a little detour and casually went to the shopping district, whereupon we suddenly spotted a street vendor. There were all kinds of hats lined up and Machina stopped to look at them as she was interested.
…Hee, there was even a cat-ear hat.
Suddenly my vision had fallen onto a cute hat that was shaped like cat-ears. Together with Machina I watched the hats for a while, but I just couldn't suppress my prankish nature, so I took the cat-ear hat and put it onto her head.
"…Looks better than I thought. Really cute. Sorry to interrupt your fun, Machina, but could you mimic Nazuna for a bit?"
"Meow! I love you, Broth--- wait, where did that come from? Don't make me do weird things! Besides, this hat is, well… a bit childish, wouldn't you say? Sorry, but I don't think it suits me."
"---I'll buy this one."

“Wh- Why are you buying it without hesitation!?”
While I purchased the cat-ear hat on the spot, Machina timidly pulled on the sleeve of my clothes.
“Could it be, you’re giving this hat to Nazuna as a present?”
“No, it’s a present for you.”
After removing the price tag of the hat, I now softly made Machina wear it.
“Yeah, cute. If you like it, take it. But if you don’t want it, I can give it to Nazuna.”
“…I’ll take it.”
Holding down the hat with both her hands to signalise that didn’t want to part with it,
“Thanks, Shinobu.”
Machina lightly flushed her smooth cheeks and showed a bright smile.
That smile was so much cuter than the hat, gradually warming up my chest.
As such even I got happy, but my great deal of embarrassment encouraged me to avert my eyes from her. Then we resumed our way home, but the by-passing people smiled upon seeing Machina and as she herself noticed that too, she gradually turned redder.
But she never took off the hat, so I called out to her with a wry smile.
“Ehm, you can take it off if it’s too embarrassing, you know?”
“It sure is embarrassing… but you bought it for me and said it was cute, so I don’t want to take it off.”
…I would have never guessed it would make her so happy. In that case, I probably should have bought a more decent one. On the way home under the night sky where stars sparkled here and there, I lightly scratched my head while Machina reached out for the hat on her head and suddenly said isolated.
“In the past, my mother gave me a present like you did just now, Shinobu. Back then it were clothes instead of a hat, but I considered them childish and cruelly said ’Don’t want them’, even though it was a special present.”
As she remembered said time, her tone filled faintly with regret.
“My mother smiled a bit sadly, which kinda hurt me, but I couldn’t say

that I wanted them at this point, so I thought to properly accept them later on. But in the end… I didn't get the present."

"Because you couldn't be honest?"

When I interjected softly, Machina slowly shook her head to the side and even while smiling a bit, her voice was somewhat faltering.

"Right afterwards… my mother passed away. The house, the clothes, it all burned down and left nothing behind. It was the last present of my mother, yet I couldn't apologize, nor could I thank her for it… I was really stupid."

Still smiling forcefully, she caressing touched the hat on her head.

Surely she regretted it even now.

Machina's mother was killed by humans. She passed away due to the unreasonable impression that those who stay with devils are devils themselves… and left the Old Man Bram and Machina alone.

I couldn’t fathom just how heart-breaking that was. I simply bit down on my lips and after a short pause, I quietly opened my mouth.

“Hey, how was your mother like?”

“…A really fascinating person.”

Proudly throwing out her chest,

“As a kid, when I still couldn’t control my devil powers well, I hurt my mother by mistake. But even though she saw this inhuman power and got hurt, my mother said ‘It’s alright’ and embraced me like always.”

Softly narrowing her amber-coloured eyes,

“It didn’t bother her at all that I had devil blood in me. My mother was as kind as my sister, as smart as Kaoru, as funny as Elni and before she passed away, she was as adored by everyone as Hijiri.”

Machina slowly spun her words affectionately.

“Ever since I was small, I wanted to be like my mother. That desire grew even stronger after I came here to the human world. It’s also the reason I’m interested in the student council.”

Shifting her yearning gaze to the starry sky, she filled her tone with a warm passion.

“I believe that I can get closer to my mother when I become the student president and get along with a lot of people, doing something for them. That I can live as a human when I become so kind that people around me boast about it.”

Stopping her words while still looking up to the starry sky, Machina suddenly dropped her voice.

“But, the election seems more difficult than I thought.”

“…You’re insecure?”

“You heard what Hijiri said, right? The current Vice-President is running too. She seems really popular, so it’s way more likely that she’ll get elected instead of a no-name like me.”

While making a weak sigh, she cast down her eyes a bit.

“Hijiri’s election would have been a given if she had run for it. If somehow my sister or Elni could run for it, they probably would become the student president too. But it’s no good for me.

I can’t be like them at all.”

“You don’t have to be… like them.”

Slowly and quietly,

“Sure, they may have qualities you don’t have. But you also have qualities they don’t have.”

I naturally let my feelings flow out of my mouth.

“You were called a ‘Failure’ like myself. But unlike me, you can’t hurt anyone, are really strong and kind. Moreover, you have a lot of cute sides.”

That was why I was no match for Machina.

“Precisely because you’re like that, we all want to help you. For your sake, I’ll even cross-dress. I’ll do anything. Therefore…”

Reaching out my hand straightforward without hesitation,

“Let’s work hard together from now on.”

I petted her head as gentle as possible, whereupon Machina spread her arms a bit

“…You’re so caring, Shinobu. Just like my sister.”

and maybe tried to hug onto me.

But she slowly lowered her spread arms and spilled quiet words.

“It’s so mysterious. Normally you screw around, only tell jokes, tease me or make me do weird things and sometimes do sexual harassment, yet when you pet my head like this, I forget about all that and think about wanting to stay with you forever…”

“Want a hug then?”

“Fufu, says Mr. Shy. It’s one of your usual jokes, right?”

Regretfully getting away from my hand, Machina smiled fleeting with “Stupid Shinobu”.

But her smile illuminated by the starlight was somehow fickle and for some reason my chest started to hurt, getting the sudden impulse of wanting to embrace her.

Amidst that, Machina showed a bit of hesitation, then grabbed my hand reserved.

A small and soft palm. The warmth transferred over from it slowly spread over my whole body while my heart gradually filled with passion. My feelings became stronger.

—I want to protect her forever.

Even as a hybrid devil, Machina was chasing after her mother’s vestige even now and wished to live as a human in the very human world that took her mother away from her.

—I want to be with her forever.

Not all that honest with a weak side like Old Man Bram had said, but incredible cute and kind, she was my family.

—If it was for her sake, I could do anything.

Returning the squeeze on her small palm, I moved my gaze a bit, whereupon the moon, which was clearly visible now, gently illuminated Machina's profile…

* * *

Why was a winter's morning so cold?

Early morning on the first day of the election campaign period. Like we had agreed on in the meeting the other day, I would cross-dress and stand in front of the school gate together with Machina from today on, greeting the incoming students. We technically also arranged the help from our classmates, but as I woke up earlier than usual, I was not only quite sleepy, but cold too.

If I were to give in to the temptation of my sleepiness here, it would make me the kind of useless guy that lets his classmate work for the election campaign while enjoying another nap in the warm bed himself.

…I didn't want to become that kind of guy.

Therefore I bid a cool farewell to my bed and dressed myself snugly next, leaving my room elegant.

But, I was actually damn sleepy. It was damn early and I somehow managed to get up by myself without my cell phone alarm. But having Luna wake me up in the morning was still the best.

Due to having lost my morning's pleasure, I couldn't shake off my sleepiness and moved on while stifling a yawn, whereupon I suddenly run into Elni in the hallway.

Elni probably only just got up herself too. Her usual twintails-tied hair was hanging down straight and she still wore her nightcap on her head. Seemingly she was more cold than I, as she lightly shivered her delicate body.

“Morning, Elni. So cold again today. I see you’re shaking a bit, are you okay?”

“…I’m done for. I hate the cold. The Goddess stands no chance against rain, wind, snow, summer heat or Shinobu’s coolness.”

“Rather frail for a Goddess. You don’t stand a chance against anything.”

“—But I stand a chance against life! And against myself! Anyway, to escape this cold, I’ll go on a trip to warm place!”

“Hey, don’t spout cool phrases while trying to sleep in my arms. Go make a short trip for the heated table in the living room.”

I made a small retort like that, but Elni’s body was really warm, her pleasant fragrance tickled my nasal cavities and I got excited by a sweet and soft sensation, but I kept quiet about that to Elni.

Cladding myself in composure, I moved on again, then softly pulled her off from my body, which she was clinging to, in front of the living room. Upon that, Elni headed straight for the heated table in the living room. While watching that with a side-glance, I went to the dining kitchen, where surprisingly everyone was already present.

…They all wake up rather early.

My mother and Machina sat at the table with their heads together, reading the morning newspaper, whereas Luna prepared breakfast with an adorable apron in the kitchen. Nazuna was wiping her head with a towel, as she had taken a shower, and came running over with a smile as soon as she noticed me.

“Morning, Brother! Looks like you got up on your own today.”

“Yeah, shamefully it was a tough fight. Morning, Nazuna. You’re up early today too.”

“Yeah! Because I’m training every morning! The Nazucat Knuckle-arrow lit up my fire this morning too!”

“Even your proud Knuckle-arrow will be defeated by this cold. Even now, I’m about to freeze up. Do something about it, Nazuna.”

Replying with an energetic “Meow!”, Nazuna hugged onto me while still smiling. Apparently she was going to warm me up with her own body temperature.

“Ohh, so warm. No need for heaters this winter then.”

When I smiled a bit and petted her head, Nazuna rubbed her small body against mine like a cat with “Meow, meow”.

In the corner of my vision, Machina was looking at me kind of envious and my mother, noticing that, showed a roguish smile, calling out to her.

“Hey Machina-chan, I don’t think Nazuna alone can relieve Shinobu’s cold. He said he’s freezing up, remember? So why don’t you hug onto him as well?”

“W- Well, since the situation calls for it— wait, no! Why are even you teasing me, Tomoe-san! Nazuna can handle it on her own.”

“…And your real thoughts?”

“I want to get my head petted like Nazuna after all… wait, I said don’t tease me! Why are you and Shinobu so good at sweet talking? Is it in the genes?”

“Ehm, I think you’re just easily falling for it. If anything, I would say Shinobu got his frivolous mouth and natural gigolo ability from my husband.”

While speaking out a fact that sadly couldn’t be denied, my mother showed a wry smile and asked further.

“Still, why are you so shy with everyone, Machina-chan? Just cling to Shinobu once in a while when you want to play or attention. You can hug or kiss him like Luna-chan does, you know?”

“…I would feel bad for my sister.”

Knitting her eyebrows a bit, Machina mumbled with a small voice. On the other hand, I couldn’t hear her words well and exchanged a look with Nazuna, whereas Luna approached me with a smile and holding a coffee cup with both her hands.

“Shinobu-san, please have this to wake you up. How many sugar cubes do you want?”

“I’m fine with black. I can’t get enough of the flavour and bitterness.”

“So mature, Brother!”

Regardless of my slightly forced behaviour, Nazuna looked at me with sparkling eyes, then shifted her gaze curiously to the coffee.

“Hey Brother, can have a sip?”

“…Nazucat, can you appreciate the bitterness?”

“I, I can! My dream is to become an enchantress like Kaoru-san! I’ll show you that I like black coffee!”

Well, I knew that her dream was to become an enchantress, but why did add “like the perverted Maid” in front of it? Since when had she added that unnecessary part?

I knew I was being rather rude to Kaorun, but I only felt a bit guilty, whereupon Nazuna took a sip from the coffee without time for me to stop her.

“M- Meow~! I can’t drink this after all!”

“…It’s a long road to being an enchantress.”

Nazuna raised pitiable scream. I took the coffee cup from Nazuna with a wry smile and enjoyed the rising flavour lordly, then I took a sip like Nazuna to enjoy the bitter taste reserved for adults.

“…Let’s give it to Mom.”

“Y- You’re such a kid, Brother!”

I couldn’t really appreciate the bitterness of the coffee and Nazuna made a sudden cutting remark astonished.

“Don’t make a bitter face and drink it yourself. You can’t get enough of it, right?”

“D- Do not worry, Shinobu-san. I will bring you some sugar right away.”

My mother’s merciless retort and Luna’s warm kindness kind of hurt me…

After finishing breakfast and getting ready for school, Machina and I hurried on our way to school with white breaths while everyone else sent us off with a “Give it your all”.

By the way, even though we were going earlier than usual, Nazuna still came with us and told us about the student council election that ended recently at her middle school to give at least a bit of reference.

“…So at the support speech, Mii-chan and I showed the magic tricks we learned from Elni-chan and everyone liked it. I don’t know if it’s thanks to that, but my friend Arisugawa-san, who run for the president position, was elected.”

“You guys really did the magic tricks…”

“We practiced a lot after all. Arisugawa-san was really happy too. She made her usual loud laughter with ‘Ohoho~! Finally my time has come!

Ohoho~!', but afterwards… she cried."

"Sh- She must have been really happy."

While I gave agreeable responses like that, Nazuna tried her best at remembering about the election and gave us all kinds of advices, but sadly hardly any of that was really helpful. Still, Machina listened to her and narrowed her eyes gentle.

"Thank you, Nazuna. That's helpful."

At the usual crossroad. Machina tightly hugged Nazuna on the parting, then softly took my hand, walking on just like that.

But it was certainly rare for Machina to do something like that.

The way to school together with Nazuna and me. Machina's actions gave off the feeling that she really wanted to treasure that time, which made me dubious. But I didn't interject in particular and headed to school together with Machina. When I set foot into the classroom, the greater half of the girls in class had a joyful smile as soon as they noticed me.

"Ah, Nanjou-kun and Orangelo-san are here!" "It's time for cross-dress!" "We'll make the greatest cross-dress for Orangelo-san's sake!" Leave it to us, Orangelo-san. Also… Katou-kun, I can understand that you want to record all this with your digital camera, but we aren't having a photo shooting here today. Concentrate on the election."

With that, the girls dragged me to the changing room like on an arrest, putting me into cross-dress in no time.

…I'll keep it a secret that the girls looked like piranhas for a moment.

But even though I was prepared for it, cross-dressing was indeed painful. For a while now I was feeling chilly as I wore a skirt now. Occasionally I had heard that a lot of women were sensitive to the cold, but it was impressive how they could keep wearing a skirt in this cold.

After I left the changing room with that impression, I glanced at the girl walking next to me.

Big eyes and a smooth bridge of nose. Smooth white skin and the rumoured F-Cup sized huge breasts.

The girl with the innocent charm was my classmate and childhood friend, Minami Ouka.

She was going to help with the early morning election campaign too.

While I got cross-dressed, Machina likely headed to the front gate together with our classmate, the Pervert and started her campaign by now. I quickly should join her.

Thinking so, I headed for the school gate, whereas Minami suddenly pulled out dog-ears from her pocket and gave me a curious look.

"Shinobu-chan, you're really pretty today."

"I heard that plenty already. Like this, I can get any discounts on Lady's day. It has already come down to this, so I'll just bewitch boys and girls alike for Machina's sake."

"Th- Then how about putting on these dog-ears?"

"…It would make me too popular, so better not."

While gently rejecting the dog-ears, I moved to the school gate with Minami, who lightly dropped her shoulders, but for some reason Machina knitted her eyebrows troubled nearby by and the Pervert next to her also made a wry smile.

By the way, the Pervert with the handsome features was my best friend, Asada Kouta, whose essential parts were mainly made up of siscon and lewdness.

Well, that aside. When I doubtfully followed Machina and Asada's look, there were already unknown students at the school gate and immediately understanding the situation, I frowned a bit.

"… I see. We all had the same idea, huh."

"No. That's not it, Shinobu-chan."

Even though her spot for the greeting had been taken, for some reason Minami shook her head and replied.

"Not all of us had the same idea. My idea was— how I can cling to you with the cold as an excuse or how I can put dog-ears onto you!"

"…You're erotic as always."

"I, I'm not erotic! I was partly joking!"

After denying it with red cheeks, Minami corrected her tone and continued.

"Anyway, what do we do now? It would be for us to cut into their position, right? For now, I'll go back to the shoe lockers. It should still be free there…"

"Okay, please secure the place for us. Thanks, Minami. You're erotic and cute again today."

"I, I'm happy for the cute part, but you could you leave out the erotic?"

While answering reserved, Minami went back on the way we came on and after watching her leave, I headed in front of the school gate and softly rested my palm on Machina's head.

"Sadly it looks like the gate won't work. Let's give up on it for today. Minami just went to secure the shoe lockers for us. After we spied on our opponents a bit, let's join Minami."

"Yes, I'll have to thank Minami later on. And I heard it from Asada just now. See the girl with the ponytail in the group? She's the current Vice-President."

"Hee, so that's her. She certainly has an aura."

When I followed Machina's look, I could see a girl with beautiful hair tied up in a ponytail.

Her almond eyes full of confidence were impressive. She was rather brilliant, albeit not as much as Hijiri, and you could tell with one glance that she was the leader of the group. For a short while Machina and I silently watched them, whereupon the still present Asada gave an explanation with a sullen face.

"To stay on the topic, her name is Himuro Kana. Her three sizes are 87-58-84, E-Cup. She's popular with the students, though not as much as Gogyou-san, and well trusted amongst the teachers too. But I don't really like her. It's kind of unpleasant."

"Unpleasant? What's up with you, Asada? Saw your face in a mirror?"

"Yeah, seeing my ugly self in the mirror displeased me greatly— as if! The heck you're talking about, Nanjou! Besides that's rude, when my face is essential handsome!"

"…I would say God made an essential mistake when he gave you that face."

While giving such a retort, I tried to enjoy our usual slightly harsh communication, but on a rare occasion, Asada didn't went along with my joke and disgustingly grabbed the sleeve of my clothes with "Listen to me seriously!".

"I can't deal with Himuro. She's scary. You know, actually, she… is always watching me with lewd eyes."

“To the infirmary, at once. And don’t come back. Your paranoia is a serious case.”

“No! It’s the truth! She’s really looking at me with weird eyes! She must be an even greater pervert than me!”

“If you don’t give it a rest, you’ll be sued for defamation. Besides, Himuro-san was it? What part of her looks like a pervert? At first glance, she looks like a nice girl.”

I commented so a bit wearily, but Asada furiously shook his head.

“The world has people called closet pervert, you know? She’s that kind of pervert. Without doubt, she’s a pervert. And a hardcore one at that. Even I’m afraid of her.”

“So what? Let’s say she is a pervert, then our school has a pervert as a Vice-President? And that pervert is even running for the president position. Are you implying she’s running a perverted campaign for perverts from perverts?”

“…It’s annoying how you keep using pervert, pervert more than I. What’s with that distrusting look! Believe me already, you beautiful bitch! I said Himuro is a pervert! I’ll put my life, which is even more important than earth itself, on the line for it!”

“Not convincing, when it’s such a cheap life. Besides, what you mean with beautiful bitch? Are you picking a fight, stupid Siscon?”

“A siscon is a characteristic! What’s wrong with loving my older sister? To begin with, you’re a siscon too for loving your little sister!”

While quarrelling half-jokingly, I had a bad communication with Asada, whereupon Machina hastily got between us and mediated right away.

“H- Hey, stop it, you two. It’s rude to say ‘Pervert, Pevert’ with a loud voice. Himuro has been looking this way for a while now, you know? She’s surely angry.”

Just like Machina had said, the current Vice-President Himuro-san was looking our way. Or to be more precise, she shot a somewhat passionate gaze at Asada. That said, she didn’t really look angry and approached us with a smile.

Instantly Asada turned pale and retreated without hesitation. Seeing that, Himuro-san made a small sigh, then shifted her gaze towards Machina and me.

"I believe you are Nanjou-kun and Orangelo-san?"

"Yeah, that's right. You know us?"

"Of course. You are famous at school."

"As the handsome gentleman and the beautiful Tsundere?"

"…No, as the shy cross-dressing idol and the red-haired queen."

Instantly, both Machina and I dropped her our shoulders and hung our heads.

"Ah, I'm sorry. I apologize if I have offended you."

"No, it's alright. Rather, did we offend you? Having the Pervert and me call you a 'Pervert' must have been annoying, right? I'm really sorry about that."

"Fufu, I don't mind, so don't apologize. I didn't come to complain. I just wanted to greet you. Maybe you heard from Asada-kun already? I'm Himuro Kana, Orangelo-san's election rival."

With her almond eyes still full of confidence, she looked straight at Machina with these eyes.

"We'll be opponents in the election, but let us fight fair and square."

Himuro-san extended her slender hand for a handshake. In regards, Machina timidly took her hand, as she was somewhat overwhelmed by her refined behaviour and personality.

"B- Best of luck to both of us."

"….So cute."

Saying so, Himuro-san licked over her lips bewitching for a second, so I got in between them right away to take Machina under my wings.

It, It might be better not to make fun of Asada's sense of smell. Maybe Himoru-san really was a pervert?

When I disrespectful feared so, Himuro-san shifted her gaze from us to the school building and opened her mouth remembering with "Reminds me,".

"I heard that on a rare occasion Asada-kun and the gentle Sadist are working for the election this time. With Asada-kun on your side, I can't let my guard down."

"I know that Asada has his connections, but… who's that gentle Sadist?"

"The shy cross-dressing idol. It's your other nickname, Nanjou-kun."

On my casual question, Himuro-san answered with faintly flushing her cheeks. Ignoring me, who got a light shock, she mixed a charm into her tone for some reason.

“Remember that I said you were famous at school? To be honest, I have been interested in Nanjou-kun for a while. Because I’m a maso— I mean, because Nanjou-kun is so charming.”

She made a rather concerning utterance, but Himuro-san gave me a somewhat passionate gaze as if nothing had happened.

“Hey Nanjou-kun, do you want to enter the student council if I get elected? Of course I’ll invite Asada-kun too. I’ll just create new positions for some kind of reason… What do you say?”

Along with a bewitching smile, Himuro-san brought her finely chiselled features closer to me, whereupon Machina tightly grabbed the sleeve of my clothes and flickered her eyes with worry.

…Hey, hey. There was no way I would be swayed from something like this.

Shifting my gaze slowly back to Himuro-san,

“I appreciate the offer, but I don’t like the idea of working under someone.”

and resting my hand softly on Machina’s head at the same time, I made my tone more decisive with “However”.

“That said, I wouldn’t mind working under her. Just not anyone else. So I have no intentions to work for anyone but her.”

“… I see.”

Hearing my answer with my true feelings, Himuro-san sighed a bit regretful.

“To make the gentle Sadist say all that, I expected nothing less from the Queen.”

“Hey, don’t call me by that nickname.”

“In the first place, I’m not a Queen!”

In spite of my and Machina’s instant retort, Himuro-san seemed not bother by it

“The strongest rival is you after all, Orangelo-san. I can leave the other candidates alone, but you alone are different. Seems like you’re popular with the students too.”

and shifted her confident eyes to Machina, faintly raising her tone against her.

“Still, I’ll win against you and make the Pervert and gentle Sadist mine— I mean, I’ll get Asada-kun and Nanjou-kun’s support. Good-bye, Orangelo-san.”

“…Did you just say you would make them yours? You said that for sure. I think you would do better respecting people’s will.”

Machina warned her reserved, but Himuro-san waved her hand without replying to it and turned around, leaving while saying “I spoke too much of my true feelings” to herself.

Amidst that, I got the feeling that I suddenly saw Kaorun’s face in the corner of my vision, but apparently Machina didn’t notice it and jerkily pulled on my sleeve she held onto.

“Hey Shinobu, you said you wouldn’t work for anyone but me, is that true?”

“—Quite right, Machina. While living in harmony with Hijiri, I want to keep laying down on your or Luna’s ample ass. Damn, life isn’t all too bad.”

“Yep, like Kaorun said, your asses— As if! What a distortion! It’s completely off! Though I carelessly leaked my true feelings since I kind of admire Machina…”

At the time I retorted, I added something unnecessary, which made Machina turn red, but I stopped my words midway and cleared my throat with a cough. Anew I faced the suddenly appeared Kaorun.

Maybe she borrowed it from Hijiri. Kaorun perfectly wore the uniform of our school and didn’t stand out at all here. Well, in a way she did, since it suited her very well.

But, I tilted my head doubtfully.

“…What are you doing here?”

“Reconnaissance on the opponent, I suppose. Like they say, if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperilled in a hundred battles. Besides, I was concerned about you, so I decided to drop by for a bit.”

“Hijiri’s not with you?”

“Hijiri-chan is not suited for tasks like this. Because her glamour lets her stand out. But then, she looked kind of disappointed, as she wanted to join in as well. However, as she was thinking of you, Machina, she showed me her usual dignified smile with ‘I have to do something too’, you know?”

Hearing these warm-hearted words, Machina flickered her eyes a bit and noticing that, Kaorun showed a slightly dubious expression while shifting her gaze towards the school building.

“I will resume my reconnaissance now. Please leave it to me and concentrate on your own tasks, Machina. I will gather all the data on the other candidates. Especially the girl called Himuro deserves my full—eh, meow!”

A complete turn-around from her soft tone. Kaorun suddenly raised hysteric voice. The reason for that was undoubtedly that Machina embraced Kaorun. Wasn’t this a first? Gently pulling Kaorun into an embrace, Machina mixed her tone with kindness.

"…I'm so happy. Thanks for helping me, Kaoru."

"W- W- Wh- Wh- What are you saying! I, I am just taking a natural course of actions. It does not require any gratitude. After all, you are… my friend."

Turning bright red up to her ears and replying so, Kaorun hastily got away from Machina.

Then she went off in an escape, but she must have been quite agitated. On her way she tripped on a rare occasion and turned even redder upon fleetingly looking over to us, then got up quickly and walked away again.

While watching after all, I noticed my mouth naturally forming a faint smile.

"She rarely shows it, but Kaorun quite likes you too."

"…I also, well, like her…"

Smiling embarrassed, Machina softly took my hand.

"I- It's about time we head for the shoe locker too. Minami and Asada are waiting. I have to give my best at the campaign to not let down my supporters."

"Yeah, you can count on me for backup. Even in cross-dress, I'll be cool."

I nodded with such a joke, but Machina was even more kind than usual, which inevitable made me feel something amiss again, and even while we conducted our morning campaign, I just couldn't shake off that feeling…

* * *

My classmates participated in the election campaign more motivated than I had thought. As to not lose against the Vice-President Himuro-san, everyone helped out and Machina's popularity raised from the greetings in the morning, during lunch break and even after school. Additionally conducting numerous discussions and campaign pledges. we greeted the evening at the end of a busy week.

Machina and Elni had gathered in our living room. While sitting at the heating table, they enjoyed a game of poker on my initiative together with me with the condition “The loser has to listen to one order of the winner” added.

During that, Elni, who lost all her betting chips, started to pretend to sleep to fool us and Machina and I watched at her with a wry smile, whereupon

“*snore, snore*…”

Softly pushing her cheek onto the table, Elni was really sleeping of all things at some point by making peaceful sleeping sounds. When I looked at her, somehow even I got sleepy.

Maybe it was the power of the comfy heated table, but I leaked a yawn from my sleepiness, whereupon Machina quietly stood up and left the living room, only to return after a while with a blanket and paper. Next she put the blanket over Elni, sat down at the heated table and dropped her gaze onto the paper while putting her hand against her chin with a “Mhm”, as she was thinking about her election speech.

Now Luna entered the living room with a smile.

She was carrying a basket with tangerines in her hands, sat down at the heated table and peeled a tangerine from the basket, then gentle held it out to me with “Shinobu-san, please open up wide~” while still smiling. I felt slightly embarrassed, but moved by her soft smile, I let Luna feed me the tangerine, whereupon Machina looked somewhat envious at Luna and the sleeping Elni suddenly raised her head, looking at me right away and raising her voice a bit with “Ah!”.

“Keeping the tangerines to yourself, that’s not fair, Shinobu! I don’t know why, but I was sleeping!”

“…You reap what you sow.”

When Machina retorted with an ironic smile, Elni dropped her gaze half-asleep and puffed up her cheeks a bit upon noticing that all her poker chips were gone from the loses.

“Who was it! Who took my chips while I was sleeping! That’s so mean!”

“…Of course they’ll be taken when you lose.”

“Did you dream of winning, or what?”

Machina retorted again and I lightly slapped her face, which apparently completely woke up Elni and she cracked a joke with a meek face.

“Getting hit – fixed the circuits – in my head.”

“You’re like an old radio.”

This time I showed a bittersweet smile, whereupon Elni laughed embarrassed and Machina called out to her roguish.

“Hey Elni, what was the loser of the game going to do again?”

“…Getting feed a tangerine by you.”

“Right, that was it. I’ll peel one right away, so wait a bit— wait, that’s not it! I won, so I get to give you an order!”

Even while showing her usual tricked&retort combo, Machina peeled a tangerine cheerfully and moreover put it into Elni’s mouth, making a request.

“I’m writing my campaign speech right now, but could you help me, Elni?”

“…Me? Your speech? Aren’t you asking the wrong one?”

“You should be able to come up with something interesting, no? It ends up way to stiff when I write it alone. You just have to be your usual stupid self.”

“Then leave it to me! My usual stupid— wait, who are you calling stupid! That’s a bit rude! Now I’ll come up with something extra interesting to put you to shame!”

While playing around like that, both Machina and Elni dropped their gazes on the paper and started to wreck their brains. On the other hand, I became sleepy while watching them and started to doze off, whereupon Luna gave me a soft suggestion.

“Shinobu-san, if you are sleepy, go to bed, okay?”

“…I’m fine, I think. I don’t plan to sleep until I took my bath and ate dinner…”

“But you look like you will fall asleep any moment. I will go prepare the bath and dinner, but you will catch a cold when you sleep in the heated table. So let me bring you to your bed.”

“…Seems like you would do something weird to me, so no thanks.”

“I, I will not do such a thing! Sure, I gave you a kiss mark the other day, but you did not pay any attention to me back then, so I felt like pulling a little prank…”

Luna blushed and started to defend herself, but even while feeling guilty, I slowly closed both my eyes and abandoned myself to the slumber.

“Uhm, Shinobu-san, please listen to me. You cannot sleep here, okay?”

“It’ll be fine, probably. I don’t intend to sleep until I had my bath…”

“Y- You look like you are going to sleep for real. It would be too dangerous to take a bath like that, Shinobu-san. If you want, I can accompany you in the bath.”

“…Sounds good. Please do.”

“Eh? Really? But you are only saying that because you are already half-asleep…”

“No, I’m not. Really. I can promise you.”

“I, Is that so. I am really happy. It is a promise then.”

“Sure. I actually have a lot of willpower. Even if I take a bath together with the natural erotic big sister, my reasoning would never…”

Yeah, it wouldn’t last. I had spilled my true feelings due to my sleepiness. To my sorrow, Luna flushed her cheeks happily and sparkled her eyes, so I timidly started talking in a panic.

“Ehm, sorry, Luna. Please forget I said all that. I’ll take my bath alone—wait, h- huh? Luna-san? Could it be… you’re angry?”

“…You are always joking around, Shinobu-san.”

Standing up while sadly facing sideways, Luna swiftly left the room.

“W- Wait a sec, Luna! I’m sorry! Please come baack!”

My sleepiness was completely blown away. While I stood up and left the living room in a haste, I could hear Elni and Machina’s voices say “It’s like he’s chasing his runaway wife” “…I want to take a bath together with him too” “Eh? What did you just say, Machina?”, but I certainly had no time to mind it.

Running down the hallway in pursue of Luna right away, I yelled out apologies to her.

“I’m really sorry! I meant no harm! Forgive me, Luna!”

“Sh- Shinobu-san? You do not need to apologize so much. You were just speaking half-asleep, yet I am sulking like this. Thus I should be apologizing.”

Luna, as she turned around, looked apologetic, which made me more keen on my apology.

“Being half-asleep doesn’t serve as an excuse. It’s a fact that I made you angry. To make up for it, I’ll listen to one request of yours. So forgive me.”

“C- Can I request anything?”

Ah, I might have carelessly run my mouth again. Flushing my cheeks like before, Luna sparkled her eyes. In regards, I decided to add some words reserved.

“…As long as it’s not taking a bath together, I’ll listen to anything.”

“Then, well, could we sleep together tonight?”

M- More or less an easy request. When I reluctantly nodded back, Luna showed a bright smile and disappeared into the bath anteroom like that while humming.

I believed that she started to clean the bath now. With a side-glance at her, I made a small sigh and returned to the living room, but for some reason Elni and Machina were in a little dispute and as soon as they noticed me, they raised their voices a bit.

“Shinobu! Listen to this! I gave my best to come up with a speech! Yet Machina said ’Hey Elni, is something wrong with your head?’ worriedly! So I inadvertently ended up nodding with ’Yeah’!”

“It’s your fault for saying something so stupid that makes you nod inadvertently! I’m sure you don’t realize how stupid you are because of your stupidity!”

“I realize at least that much, how rude— wait, who are you calling stupid! I’m not stupid! I’m just slightly less intelligent!”

“That’s what we generally call stupid! Besides, there’s no way I can use that for the elect—”

“Wait, stop! For now, calm down, you two.”

Left alone, the quarrel would surely continue. I got between them right away and cleared my throat with a cough. I looked at Machina to ask for the circumstances first.

“So, what are you two quarrelling about? What happened?”

“…We wrote my election speech together until a moment ago, but Elni said I should do magic tricks like Nazuna and on top of that, she even suggested I should use hypnosis. Don’t you think there’s a limit to how much she can joke around?”

A valid point. Slightly wearily, I shifted my gaze to Elni.

"Could it be, you dropped your brain somewhere?"

"…Yeah. Since it's so small, I can't seem to find it."

"S- Sorry, Elni. I only wanted to show you the limit of a joke. So please don't make such a sad face."

"Don't apologize, Shinobu. I'm at fault. I gradually reached my limit by writing the speech, so I told a weird joke to get a change of pace. But that wasn't okay. I'm sorry, Machina, that I couldn't help you at all."

When Elni lowered her head apologetic,

"…I'm sorry too. I got impatient, because I couldn't come up with any good ideas. You only wanted to be helpful, yet I failed to noticed that and said something mean to you."

Knitting her eyebrows, Machina lowered her head too. Apparently the two of them reconciled right away. After showing each other a smile, Machina called out softly to Elni.

"Hey Elni, I don't plan to use it for the election, but that hypnosis really work?"

"Are you interested?"

"Not really. I was just wondering how it's different from the charm spell of us devils, but when I saw a program about hypnosis the other day, I thought it sounded really fake. It was all a scam, right?"

"Mhm~ Some of them surely are scams, but at TV shows they rehearsal beforehand for indoctrination to make it easier to fall under hypnosis."

"Hee, is that so?"

As her curiosity was piqued, Machina leaned over a bit, whereupon Elni replied with a big nod.

"Yeah, because real hypnosis is supposed to be applied slowly over time. The world knows people as hypnotists. A lot of them are frauds, but I think hypnosis does work."

"You're quite knowledgeable about it. How do you know all that, Elni?"

"A woman I know is a self-proclaimed hypnotist. She taught me various things, so I know some stuff. If you want, I can hypnotise you for a bit, Machina."

"Fufu, sounds interesting. For recreation then please."

She literally must have wanted to take a breather. Machina smiled softly. In regards, Elni eagerly started to prepare, as she wanted show off her good side. That said, the preparations were as you sometimes see it in a manga, she just tied a string to a five-yen coin.

But, there was one point different from the manga. Elni let Machina herself hold the string with the coin.

“When I say ‘Okay’, this coin will swing to the side. There’s no need to physically swing it, just think in your heart that it is… ’Okay’… The coin started to swing left and right. It’s swinging… It’s swinging… It’s steadily swinging… Swinging more…. and more… “

When Elni applied something like indoctrination by speaking with a soft and easy to understand tone without a pause, there was no change in the coin at first, but in time Machina started to swing the coin by herself and noticing that, Elni softly whispered into my ear.

“…This might actually work, Shinobu. People that unconsciously swing the coin themselves like that are likely to fall for indoctrination.”

It was somewhat authentic… and I didn’t want to bother them.

While I quietly took my distance from them, Elni now made Machina stop the movements of the coin, swing it sideways, stop it again, draw a circle and lastly stop it again with her still soft tone.

In that situation, Elni took the coin from the somewhat absent-minded Machina and urged her to close her eyes. Next she told her “Machina, right now you’re on a hill from where you can see a beautiful lake. A fresh wind is blowing. It feels really good with the flowers blooming near by”.

Probably it was easier to accept a comfortable indoctrination. Giving Machina a pleasant illusion by indoctrination, she likely wanted to pull her into the world of hypnosis next.

To be honest, I was doubtful about hypnosis myself, but this might actually work. Elni invested a lot of time and continued to call out to her softly, then

“—Okay. From now on, you’re Shinobu’s little sister. You call him with ’Dear Brother’. Today you’ll be a honest girl like Nazucat. You don’t need to hold back or get embarrassed like usually. Fawn on Shinobu all you want.”

Elni softly gave the last indoctrination and then clapped her hands to make her open her eyes, whereupon Machina slowly opened her eyes and flickered her gaze with “Mm…” somewhat sleepy.

…Did the hypnosis really work?

Elni’s earlier words had a somewhat solicitous ring to it. Moreover, I would like to see a honest Machina. Feeling a bit curious, I checked her state, whereupon Machina restlessly looked around, but upon seeing me, a smile bloomed on her face.

“When did you get back home— Dear Brother?”

The hypnosis might have worked perfectly.

As soon as she approached me, Machina generously pressed her soft and voluminous breasts onto me and clung to me without hesitation. Moreover, she brought her juicy pink lips closely, only to innocently start kissing my cheek. Inadvertently I leaked a surprised voice from my mouth.

“M- Machina? What’s up so suddenly? Were you really hypnotized?”

“…Hypnotized? What are you talking about?”

Apparently she wasn’t aware of it herself. Machina tilted her head while still clinging to me.

“More importantly, what is the matter with you, Dear Brother? Your face is bright red. Are you okay?”

“To be frank, I’m not really okay. Because you’re suddenly kissing me. Why are you doing that?”

“Because seeing your face made my chest hot and I felt like kissing you. Can I give you one more?”

“No. Please stop. I’m at my limit in various ways.”

“I see… You are against it. Could it be, you… hate me?”

“No, no! That’s not it! Not at all!”

Getting away from me, Machina damped her eyes sadly.

Wh- Why was she about to cry now? Even while I was in quite the panic, I hastily explained.

“Y- You know, I, well, like you. But no kissing. It’s too embarrassing.”

“…My sister is allowed to kiss you, but I am not?

“No, I wouldn’t go that far. Fine, kisses or hugs, just bring it on.”

Machina adorable puffed up her cheeks sulking with still wet eyes, so I inadvertently felt excited and spread my arms right away, but

“I knew it, you are so kind.”

I, I might have been overhasty. Colouring her cheeks in a bright red happily, Machina clung to me again and following placed a kiss on the corner of my lips with a sweet "*kiss*" sound.

…Not just my cheeks, I felt hot up to my ears.

Moreover, in spite of me being in such a situation, Elni, who had quietly watched so far, childish teased me with "Fufu, Shinobu was kissed" and a smile, so I turned even redder, whereas Machina suddenly got away from me and straightaway rushed over to Elni.

"Elni."

She happily animated her voice and this time presented Elni with a hug and kiss.

Receiving that, Elni blinked her big eyes in surprise, then timidly opened her mouth.

"M- Machina? Why even me?"

"Obviously because I like you. Sometimes I say harsh things to you, but I really like you. I did not so at first, but right now, I think of you… as a kind of older sister."

…I knew they got along, but not that Machina had opened her heart to Elni this much. Elni surely felt the same. She instantly turned red, whereas on the other hand I wanted to get back at her, so I imitated Elni and fired some childish and flouting words.

"Haha, Elni was kissed."

"—Shinobu, stop these childish acts. Okay?"

"S- Somehow, it's quite shocking to be told that by you, seriously."

There I lightly shrugged my shoulders, whereupon Luna, Nazuna and my mother showed up doubtfully in the living room together, as they had heard the ruckus.

At the same time Machina noticed them, she brightened her smile and went over to them, first hugging and kissing Luna like she had done with us. Luna blinked her eyes with "Wh- What is the matter, Machina?" and my mother widened her eyes too, whereas Nazuna called out to Machina surprised.

"Ehm, Machina-chan? What's going on? You're kinda weird."

"I am not weird. I am no different from always."

She really wasn't aware of the hypnosis herself, as she softly denied it while getting away from Luna. Then she hugged onto Nazuna with "More importantly".

"Why do you not call me with 'Oneechan', Nazuna?"

"Eh? Ehm, that's rather sudden."

"Not really. I always thought about it. Of course you do so for my sister. But you also call Hijiri with 'Oneechan', right? That is not fair. I want to be your older sister too."

"I, I consider you as an older sister, Machina-chan. You're family. But I thought you might be against it…"

"How could I be? I really like you, Nazuna."

"Yeah. I also like you— Machina-oneechan."

Nazuna surely was happy herself. Forgetting the current situation, Nazuna formed her faintly flushed cheeks into a smile, whereupon Luna smiled gentle with "Good for you, Machina", as the amiss feeling slipped her mind too.

But, as expected, my mother still seemed collected. Looking at Machina with a slight confusion, she interjected a bit humble.

"Machina-chan? Seriously, what's wrong with you? You're really a bit weird."

"…Why are even you saying that, Tomoe-san? I think I am like always."

"Th- Then, could you act like a Queen like always?"

"Q- Queen!? That is so mean! I do not really like teasing others! If anything, I like being teased gentle!"

I got the feeling she made an unbelievable coming out.

Even I became agitated unconsciously, whereupon small tears dwelled up in Machina's eyes, as she might have gotten a shock from my mother's joke. In regards, my mother hastily lowered her head.

"Sorry, Machina-chan. Not only did I take the joke too far, I also made you say something unnecessary. I apologize, so forgive me."

"… If you give me a kiss… I will forgive you, Tomoe-san."

S- Somehow, Machina was really cute. While I felt excited again, Elni, who observed everyone, pulled on my sleeve and suddenly touched a matter.

"Hey Shinobu, it's seems there are people in this world that would like to use hypnosis to make girls strip."

"Well, I guess so, but what about it?"

"The woman, who taught me hypnosis, told me that it's basically not possible to make people strip even with hypnosis. If the target doesn't mind stripping himself it's one thing, but hypnosis cannot bring out something that's not there."

"I see. So it's not almighty."

"Yeah. So even using hypnosis won't make someone do something he absolutely doesn't want to do. But if the targets thinks that it's okay or wants to do this or that, then I heard that hypnosis can make it possible."

While slowly spinning her words, she looked at Machina and narrowed her crimson eyes softly.

"…Machina actually might have wanted to act spoiled like that."

After saying so quietly, Elni shifted her gaze towards me.

"Shinobu, I think my hypnosis will wear eventually. So could you let Machina act spoiled for a little while?"

"Wow, you're really like an older sister to her…"

Machina was probably a bit stressed out from the election campaign. This might serve as a good breather. After I answered with a firm nod, I continued to watch Machina's smile for a while together with Elni…

Afterwards, Elni and I properly explained the stuff about the hypnosis to Luna and the other out of hearing from Machina. Upon that, they agreed to Elni's idea too, but later the indoctrination didn't lift at all and even now Machina was under hypnosis.

Meanwhile, as she wanted physical contact, Machina hugged and kissed me numerous times, so I was a bit worn out.

Of course I wasn't against her physical contact. Actually, I was happy about it. It was pleasant how she honestly fawned on me.

But after all, I might like the usual Machina better.

I couldn't express it well, but even when she wasn't honest and quarrelled with Elni, that was a part of her.

But well, the indoctrination should lift soon, so oh well. There was no need to seriously ponder about it like this. I quickly blew the cobwebs away and headed for the bath anteroom to take my bath.

The only thing I had to be careful about there was the possibility to run into one of our girls changing when opening the door carelessly.

If that were to happen, it would get awkward for both of us without a doubt.
Therefore I properly knocked on the door and entered the anteroom after confirming that no one was inside. Such an improper act for a pubertal boy. Following I took my clothes off coolly and cheerfully wrapped a towel around my waist in the end.
Perfect. All blind spots covered. While I nodded firmly, the door suddenly opened without a knock.
"Ah, taking a bath too, Dear Brother?"
"Kyaa! Machina you pervert!"
Because Machina had shown up suddenly, I covered my body with both my hands and raised a scream half-jokingly.
Upon that, Machina giggled "You are as funny as ever" with a small smile, but the moment she saw the sword scar running over my chest, she instantly clouded her expression and knitted her eyebrows a bit with her amber eyes flickering.
…I got that scar from Hijiri when I protected Machina previously.
I myself wasn't bothered about it at all, but Machina might feel responsible for it. She stared somewhat teary at the scar, then she touched the scar with her warm palm like caressing it.
Her palm was soft and supple, her touch really comfortable.
But she dropped a shadow over her expression and it was painful to see her like that.
"Hey, hey. No matter how charming my hard-boiled body is, you stop touching now. Touching costs extra, you know?"
To change the atmosphere, I cracked an usual joke.
Upon that, Machina started to soften her expression, as the joke did the trick, and I made a sigh of relief in my chest, calling out to her while still keeping up the joke.
"Anyway, Machina, if possible, could you get out soon? As you can see, I have my graceful bathing time now. If you peek, I'll scream again."
"I am not going to peek… but can I come in too?"

Wh- What was she saying out of the blue? Don’t make the same request as Luna. While I greatly panicked, Machina pulled out a small glass bottle from the pocket of her skirt.

“Elni gave me a self-made bathing powder earlier. Let us make use of it and go in together.”

“Bathing powder? Wow, Elni can even make something like that? Well, it’s really girly… but that aside. Going in together is a no-go. Something so more embarrassing than hugs and kisses is too much for me.”

“But we are siblings? You do not need to get so flustered.”

Handing me the bathing powder from Elni, she continued with “You are weird, Dear Brother” and took off her top and skirt without hesitation, as she was eager to take a bath together. In no time she was just in her underwear.

“H- Hey, I didn’t agree to it! And cover your body a bit! You’re girl, so it’s unbecoming.”

“…Really, why are you so flustered?”

While tilting her head doubtful, Machina obeyed my instruction for now and turned around, but unhooked her brassiere with the hand behind her back right away.

There the bra felt fluttering to the ground and my vision fell onto her white smooth backline that was without any moles. Her splendid slender waist. And her well-formed bottom that perked up in her panties.

Bending her waist so that this bottom was sticking out towards me, Machina put her hands onto her panties and lightly shook her juicy hips right and left, slowly pulling down her underwear.

Instantly, her embarrassingly shaking snow-white bottom showed up and her buttocks with soft elasticity trembled as well. Moreover, between her charming buttocks, I got a fleeting glance at something that I wasn’t supposed to see…

While my heartbeat fiercely accelerated at once, Machina unmindful turned around slowly and bounced her breasts seductively, even generously exposing the pink buds in the middle of her breasts.

On the other, I was inadvertently fascinated by her beautiful body and was kind of dumbfounded, whereas Machina jerkily pushed me on my back into the bath and when I returned to my senses, it was already too late.

Machina grabbed my shoulders from behind. My path to escape was blocked. She wouldn’t let me escape from here so easily. She was quite persistent…

The agitation let my pulse beat unchanged fiercely, but I freed myself from obstructive thoughts and quickly washed my body with my eyes closed as much as possible, then retreated into the bathtub for now. Next I used the Elni’s bathing powder that I got from Machina earlier.

Upon that the cloudy grown bathwater faintly hid my body and with that, it would surely keep me from seeing Machina’s seductive body, even when we took a bath together.

But the nervousness wouldn’t go away at all and when I tightened the knot on the towel around my waist while soaking in the water, Machina called out to me with a smile.

“You are rather quick with washing your body, Dear Brother. It is a shame you did not let me wash your back.”

“Conversely, I’m relieved.”

“Geez, you’re so cold…”

It was a somewhat sulking tone, but she wasn’t angry. Machina started to wash off the sweat with the shower while humming in a good mood, and going by that, Machina surely would be satisfied when we soaked in the water together just for a bit.

I closed my eyes again by thinking that, but the shower sounded rather alluring and then the sound suddenly vanished, only for Machina now finally coming into the bathtub.

When I fleetingly opened my eyelids to check on the situation, she had her back to me and luckily didn’t bring her body any closer than necessary.

…With this distance, I might not have to strain my reasoning.

I relaxed a bit, whereupon Machina slowly turned around her head and showed me an innocent smile.

“Hey Dear Brother, hug me from behind.”

“—*hug*!”

“Y- You are only speaking it out. Stop being mean and do it properly.”

In a spoiled tone, Machina leaned her back against my chest with “Dear Brother”.

St- Stop it. Because Machina moved, her beautiful bottom was now pressing onto my body. Even while having an ample softness, her hips had a tender elasticity.

That had already more than enough impact to crack my reasoning, yet Machina continued to beg me with her spoiled tone “Hurry up, Dear Brother…” while bouncing her snow-white bottom grazing.

Embracing her and sealing her movements might be better than letting her struggle alluringly like this. An unavoidable situation. I closed my eyes once more and timidly reached out my hands, embracing her from behind that way as she requested… or so I had planned, but

“Hahn!”

An unexpected bewitching voice reached my ears and on my palms I felt an extremely pleasant sensation from soft big orbs. First off, I changed the locations of my hands for a test with my eyes still closed and lifted these two round objects up from below, whereupon

“Mm, Dear Brother, do not, play with my breasts…”

At the same time of hearing this enchanting voice, I felt a juicy materials bouncing up and down on my palms. These were without doubt Machina’s breasts. O- Of all things, I did something outrageous.

Instantly a cold sweat started to break out on my forehead and when I timidly opened my eyes to confirm, I was holding up Machina’s white big breasts and these plentiful voluminous breasts were showing their upper half over the cloudy bathwater, perfectly allowing me a look on even the faintly pink pinnacle of the breasts.

Just how should I apologize… While I searched for words to apologize in my agitation, Machina faintly flushed her cheeks, as she surprisingly wasn’t angry, and showed me a roguish smile.

“Dear Brother, you pervert. What are these hands?”

“G- God’s invisible hands…”

It wasn’t the time to crack such a joke. I immediately tried to pull back my hands from her breasts, but

"Could it be, you wanted to touch my breasts?"

Saying somewhat happily, Machina overlapped her own palms with my hands.

"If it is for you, I will let you touch them all you want."

Because she told me these incredible sweet words, I fondled her breasts for a moment on a careless impulse, whereupon

"Ahh… your hands… are so wonderful…"

Her voluminous breasts that didn't fit into my palms melted in my hands and bounced sweetly to show of their outstanding elasticity.

"Fuhn… Somehow… my breasts feel hot now…"

Machina started to shiver her body alluringly and my reasoning fissured with a cracking sound, so I decided to remove my hands from her appealing breasts at once.

"Sorry, Machina. I'm already done for. I'm getting out. Please don't stop me."

"…Eh? Why? We only just got in."

I started to raise my hips along with an earnest request, but faster than that Machina changed her position with attitude and of all things clung to me from the front to stop my movements.

"Please, Dear Brother. Stay with me a bit longer. Don't go, Dear Brother."

"E- Even if you say so, sometimes a man has to go! And now is such a time! Please let go of me!"

Shouting such, I moved desperately, but sadly enough it only worsened the situation.

White huge breasts pressing onto my chest.

They showed up from the bathwater once again, writhed seductively, and sexily trembled to make waves while on top of that, even the pink buds frequently showed up fleetingly.

Moreover, as we both struggled around, in time my nipples and well, her pink pinnacles of her breasts rubbed against each other.

"Ahn… Dear Broth… Not there… Uhn…"

Machina's voice filled even more with glamour and I could feel her pink peak getting somewhat erected. While my reasoning was about to be blown away any moment and before I completely forget myself, I—

heavily slapped my cheeks with my palms to stimulate myself.
Instantly, Machina got away from me and blinked her eyes, as she was certainly surprised.
"D- Dear Brother? What are you doing? What is the matter?"
"…There was a harmful bug."
by the name of Shinobu— I added in my heart. Thanks to the hug that drove my reasoning crazy being over, I got out of the bathtub as fast as possible and grabbed the knob of the bath door.
There Machina's sad voice from the bathtub reached my ears.
"Dear Brother, you are already going?"
"I, I got a physiological phenomenon. I'll go pluck some flowers."
"…Okay. Nothing I can do then. But Dear Brother, let's take a bath together again next time."
Hearing that innocent request, I fleetingly snuck a peek, whereupon Machina was covering the central parts of her breasts with her hands for some reason, even though she didn't show any signs for covering anything before. My reasoning would crumble again if I were to think deeply about it's reason, so I refrained from doing so.
By the way, the physiological phenomenon was a lie. After replying to Machina with a wink of my hand, I got changed and moved to the dining kitchen, where I unexpectedly run into Luna.
Upon that, Luna headed for the fridge with "A milk after your bath, right" and a smile as soon as she saw me, then handed me a cup with milk. When I took the milk with words of gratitude, she casually brought up a matter.
"Reminds me, Shinobu-san, do you know where Machina is? I wanted to play with her, but I cannot find her."
"Machina is in the bath now. I guess she'll be out soon?"
"…In the bath? Ehm, you just got out of the bath and Machina will be out soon too, which means… You are not going to tell me that you took a bath together, are you?"
"Rather than taking one together, it's more like she forced her way in…"
When I answered honestly, albeit mumbling, Luna puffed up her cheeks a bit, but
"I, I am Machina's older sister. I, It is not bothering me at all. I get to

sleep together with you today anyway…"
Somewhat forcing a smile, she left the dining kitchen with saying "I wanted to go in together too" to herself. Judging by that and knowing Luna, she might have showed a smile with "I am coming in as well" if she were to spot Machina and me together in the bath, and gotten into the bathtub with us in the end.
That was a bit exciti— No, a bit dangerous. After drinking the milk, I shrugged my shoulders lightly and returned to my room…

For a change of atmosphere I wanted to enjoy some reading on the sofa in the living room today instead of my room, but for a while now Machina stood behind me and openly rested her voluminous breasts on my head.
"Hey Dear Brother, when will you play with me?"
The indoctrination still didn't wear off and she pressed for attention by bouncing her alluring breasts lightly. But even while I felt my heartbeat accelerating, I kept my gaze lowered on my novel.
"Hmp, as if the novel was your lover. Stupid Brother…"
Even while leaking a slightly sulky voice, Machina didn't move away from me at all. I kept receiving the sensation over her breasts that overflowed with elasticity and the sweet fragrance of her body, but when I finally couldn't endure it anymore, I gave a her light warning.
"…Machicat, sit down for a bit."
"Yes, okay."
As she was happy that I was paying attention to her, though whatever was going through her head, she bloomed a smile and sat down in my lap. Fufu… The sensation of her squishy butt was the best.
I had no time to enjoy her round hips and gave her another warning.
"Hey, where do you think you're sitting down? Get off right now. You're so heavy that my legs are about to break."
"I, I am not that heavy!"
Hearing my joke, Machina turned around with her lips puckered a bit, as I seemingly made her angry, and play-bit on my neck due to whatever was going through her head.
To be honest, it felt quite good, but I cracked a joke to distract.

“M- Machina… turned into BADMachicat.”

“SO BAD— wait, I am not BADMachicat! If you are that rude, I will bite you some more!”

Along with her words, Machicat happily continued the play-biting for some reason.

…Maybe Nazucat would turn out like this if she grew up.

Feeling her soft and well-formed lips on my neck, I felt incredible restless, whereupon the door of the living room suddenly opened and Luna showed up in a really sexy outfit.

The so called naked under just a white shirt. As she got out of the bath, her cheeks were lightly flushed. I could clearly see her cleavage from the unbuttoned V-neck area, moreover I couldn’t help but be fascinated her brilliant thighs and slender beautiful legs.

I was inadvertently captivated, Machina on my lap puffed up her cheeks and lightly pulled on my ear, whereas Luna as soon as she noticed us

“I, I am Machina’s older sister.”

forced a smile again and came over with her huge breasts bouncing.

“Shinobu-san, I am all ready. Let us sleep together tonight. When do you plan to go to bed?”

“…When the sky starts to get whitish. After all, I’m at the age where I wanted to smoke while getting drunk on the dawn.”

“Then I will get in the bed first and wait for you. Please join me when the night is over.”

Like I had promised her before Machina got hypnotized, Luna was keen on sleeping together.

Furthermore she was naked under just a white shirt. While I was stunned at once, Machina jerkily pulled on my sleeve while getting off my lap.

“Hey, you two are going to sleep together?”

“M- Makes you envious, huh.”

When I kind of forced a joke,

“…I will sleep with you too.”

Machina suddenly clung onto me tightly and seeing that, Luna

“I, I am Machina’s older sister. So I let Machina have the primacy tonight— wait, it is no good after all. Shinobu-san promised me. Please make it some other time, Machina!”

took my arm in resistance to Machina, as she couldn't endure it anymore.

"I rarely get such a chance! I will be sleeping together with him!"

"Th- That is not fair! It is always you!"

"…You took a bath together with him, did you not? Even though he will not do that for me… You are not being fair, Machina."

Luna raised a moderate protest. In regards, Machina hesitated for a moment, but didn't let go off me, thus the two of them jerkily pulled on my arms.

…C- Could they be quarrelling?

This was probably the first time I saw them fighting. While I was stunned even more, Machina and Luna continued their dispute while still holding my arms.

"You are not being fair, Sister! He is always so nice to you! And you always kiss and hug him! You two are really close!"

"You are close to him too. I am really envious how you two always talk so happily…"

"I am only being teased! Sure, he can be really kind, but he is even more kind to you!"

"Th- That is not true. He really treasures you. Sometimes I even think that it is not fair. Please, I beg you, give up on today."

"…I no longer want to give up."

Machina's squeezed out voice was filled with a small tremble.

"I love you, Sister! That is the reason I always gave up, since I felt sorry for you! But actually I wanted to fawn on him like you do! I want to hug and kiss him!"

Either influenced from the hypnosis or simply her true feelings,

"This will be the last time! So please! Let me stay with Shinobu a bit longer!"

…Machina let out the words "last time" and changed my title back to the usual "Shinobu", only to look at our faces like she had come back to her sentences, whereas Luna let go of my arm.

"I'm sorry, Sister, for saying something selfish."

"….It was me, who was selfish. I should have considered your feelings more."

When Machina cast down her eyes and hung her head, Luna knitted her eyebrows too and replied apologetic with “I am sorry”.

The atmosphere in the living room became somewhat heavy and Machina and Luna both felt depressed.

“I will go back to my room.” “No, I will go to my room. If you are alright with it, Shinobu-san, please sleep together with Machina.” “That will not do. You were looking forward to it, Sister. Yet I was really selfish…” “No, I did not consider your feelings, Machina…”

Like that, they got more depressed every time they opened their mouths and unable to watch this any longer, I made a suggestion reserved.

“Ehm, then how about you both come to my room?”

— Wait, even if it was on the spur of the moment, what outrageous things was I saying?

S- somehow I even got a cold sweat. When I timidly checked their reaction, Machina and Luna surprisingly changed their expression slowly into a smile after looking at each other and both nodded while still smiling. But, sleeping together with both of them… would my reasoning prevail?

I realized my slip of tongue at this point, but it was already too late. Machina pushed me on the back to the hallway with a smile, whereas Luna, regardless of being naked under her white shirt, climbed up the stairs in a hurry and the fleeting glance I got at that moment was on her snow-white bottom that unexpectedly wasn’t clad in panties.

…Luna wasn’t wearing panties? Reminded me, she was the type that slept with hardly any clothes on. But that attire would be bad for sleeping together. While I got flustered, Luna turned her head around and animated her beautiful voice.

“Well then, Shinobu-san, Machina, I will go fetch my pillow. Please give me a moment.”

“S- Sure, but more importantly, Luna, before that, please put on some—”

Before I could ask her to put on panties, Luna slipped and overturned backwards, so I inadvertently swallowed down my words and tried to support her on her waist, but I received a soft sensation on my whole face and collapsed on the spot. I absorbed the fall at once, so it didn’t hurt.

But strange enough my vision was pitch black. What was this squishy sensation that covered my face for a while now?

There was a sweet fragrance. The round warmth was pleasant too. But the lack of oxygen made me get a bad feeling alike to a déjà vu and moved my head a bit, whereupon an alluring "IYAAAH" voice suddenly reached my ears and that something that covered my face bounced bountiful.

"Shinobu-san, that is… close to… Yah… my bottom… Ahn…"

C- Close to her bottom? That meant, of all things it was Luna's beautiful butt that pressed onto my face? Then it was too risky. Luna wasn't wearing panties right now. My cheeks got hot instantly and I moved my head again to crawl out under her bottom at once, but

"Mm… You are so daring, Shinobu-san… I am happy, but you cannot do… like that…"

She probably moved in resistance. But Luna's ample hip rubbed seductively all over my head. I felt a juicy elasticity at the same time as the enchanting fragrance got stronger… I unintentionally made the situation worse. My breathing was in peril. My consciousness got dizzy. But not giving up, I continued to struggle, whereupon

"Yaah, that is, my weak spot, Nhaah, Ahhh… Haaahn!"

Suddenly a sweet soprano voice sounded and the bottom pressing on my face started to convulse in shivers. Following, Luna's bewitching moaning reached my ears.

"Mm… When you play a perverted prank like that, even I will play one too."

The lack of oxygen made me unable to move to stop Luna. While my consciousness gradually became more hazy,

"C- Calm down, Sister! I did not get the right timing, but I think he is just in pain from lack of air."

"Eh? Is that so? I thought for sure…"

Machina's flustered voice sounded somewhat distant and when Luna raised her waist, her well-formed charming bottom filled my vision and maybe from that my consciousness recovered at once, but as expected I averted my eyes from her hips and closed my eyes…

Afterwards, Luna lowered her head apologetic instead of angrily, so I spoke out an apology too. Then I returned to my room with Machina and continued to chit-chat for a while. After that I finally slept together with the two of them… while still not having asked Luna to wear panties.

By the way, Machina's indoctrination still didn't seem over. She once reverted to her usual addressing, but still called me "Dear Brother" now.

With the lights out, the room was in a faint darkness. I softly lay between Machina and Luna, where Machina animating her voice.

"Hey Dear Brother… wait, huh? Are you asleep already?"

"*snore, snore*"

"…I guess I can kiss him all I want while he sleeps?"

"I'm awake! Your dear brother is awake!"

"Mm… *kiss*…"

"Ahh! You kissed him even though he is awake! I will too!"

"L- Luna? Why are you kissing me too? Stop it, you two!"

In spite of my begging, the two of them repeated sweet kisses on my cheeks numerous times. Looked like I wouldn't get any sleep.

Enveloped by their warmth, I was wide-awake and in time Machina started to make peaceful sleeping sounds. As Luna noticed that too, she called out to me quietly.

"Shinobu-san, are you still awake?"

"Yeah, seems like I'll stay up until dawn for real, but what's up? Can't sleep?"

"Yes. I was thinking about things and lost my sleepiness."

Replying so with a still quiet voice, Luna started to tell me softly.

"Machina seemed to have a lot of fun today. She still is under hypnosis, but like she said herself, I think she really was holding back usually and actually wanted to act spoiled like today."

"…Might be."

"My father once told me that Machina was really honest as a child. She might have been a girl like today. And the reason she changed a bit was that her mother passed away."

Her voice was peaceful and gentle, yet somewhat sad.

"I believe Machina thinks that she will cause troubles again if she stays with someone or acts spoiled."

When I asked back “…Troubles?” like a parrot, Luna dropped her voice and replied.

“Machina is a hybrid devil, so she was hated as a ‘devil’ in the human world and despised as a “failure’ in the demon realm. Machina painfully understands what happens to the people that stay by her side, that she loves, in the human world.”

—Machina’s mother was killed by humans. A despised hybrid devil. Machina might think that if she were to stay with someone, that precious someone would get hurt again. While I bit onto my lips, Luna breathed out lightly and softened her tone a bit.

“Since she is like that, even I had trouble getting close to her. So when she called me ‘Sister’ for the first time, I was really happy and really came to love my cute little sister. For that moment alone, I was glad to be a devil.”

Luna slowly continued with her still peaceful tone.

“I was rather powerful in the demon realm. If anything happened, I could deal with it. I believe Machina could relax and act spoiled with me because thought that if it was with someone like me, she as a hybrid devil could stay with me without hurting me.”

“…And she can’t relax with weak humans like us?”

“Originally that might have been so. But after spending time together, I think Machina came to love you all. I get the feeling that Machina is opening her heart, more than she has ever done to me, to you and Elni in particular. But she is a really kind girl…”

After showing a small hesitation, she quietly brought up a matter.

“She might be thinking that she should go back to the demon realm before someone gets hurt because of her again. When I heard that she is running in the election, I thought she would try to live in the human world and was really happy about it.”

Temporarily stopping her words, Luna was a bit at a loss for words with “But”.

“when I look at her lately, I get a bit worried. It looks like she is trying hard for the election, but it appears she is troubled about something and is strangely kind. Besides—”

“Machina spoke to me the other day.”

Interjecting softly, I cut into Luna's words.

"She said she wants to be like her mother. She believes that she can live in the human world as a human when she gets close to her mother. That's why she's trying hard to chase after her mother."

As peaceful as Luna, I filled my words with feelings.

"Sure, she sometimes looks down. But I'm sure she'll be fine. Bram called her 'weak', but I don't agree."

Softly reaching out my hand, I petted the head of the sleeping Machina.

"Machina is far stronger and kinder than me. So she'll be fine."

"Yes…"

Replying quietly, Luna suddenly straightened up her upper body.

"I should let Machina have the primacy today after all. Machina rarely acts spoiled like she did in her childhood. At times like these, I want her to act spoiled all she wants. I mean, I am her older sister."

In the dim room, Luna left the bed with a gentle smile and brought her face closer to Machina.

"I love you, Machina" with that, she placed a small kiss on her cheek.

"Well then, Shinobu-san, I will return to my own room…"

Still smiling softly, she filled her voice with warmth.

"I will give my best too, so please support Machina from now on as well, Shinobu-san."

"I said I would protect her after all…"

When I replied with a firm nod, Luna made a relaxed sigh of relief, then quietly left the room. Left behind, I thought of Machina sleeping next to me as really lovely and like Luna had told me, I wanted to support her. I wanted to protect Machina, who was continuously hated from both humans and devils because she was a hybrid devil. While the strong feeling overflowed in my chest, I peacefully fell asleep at some time, enveloped by Machina's soft warmth…

Chapter 03: Sad Promise

Someway my body was enveloped by a soft warmth. Furthermore, someone was apparently petting my head, which felt really good.

But, I doubtfully opened my eyes to escape the slumber.

“…M- Machina?”

Subtly a surprised voice leaked from my own mouth.

In front of my eyes and nose were Machina finely chiselled features and she clung to me in the bed while gently petting my head with her slender fingers.

“Wh- What’re you doing?”

“…J- Just some physical contact.”

Replying bashful to my question,

“Morning— Shinobu-oniisama.”

Machina flushed her cheeks and smiled.

…Speaking of, yesterday it turned into me sleeping together with Machina.

While remembering that, I hastily got out of the bed at once, but… apparently the hypnosis from yesterday was still in effect. After eating breakfast, Machina sat down next to me on the sofa in living room and talked to me with a smile.

“Hey Shinobu-oniisama, do you have any plans today?”

“I’m tired from your and Luna’s kisses yesterday. My plan is to go back to sleep now.”

When I cracked such a playboy joke,

“Th- Then I will wait, so play with me when you wake up again.”

Machina softly rested her hand onto my thigh with a slightly regretful expression.

Even while the warm sensation of her palm made me somewhat agitated, I suddenly felt something amiss.

She addressed me different from yesterday. Yesterday it had been “Dear

Brother", but now it was "Shinobu-oniisama". And she did a bit of physical contact, but didn't kiss me like yesterday. She was somewhat reserved.

When I doubtfully tilted my head, Elni showed up in the living room, then called out to me with a smile once she noticed me.

"Hey Shinobu, I have a favour to ask. Can I?"

"…Your beloved Shinbou is dead. Why!"

"Because he was a spoiled brat."

Responding to my gag, Elni made a wry smile with "But Shinobu,".

"Listen to me without joking around. We were talking just now and decided that we all will go to the department store now. Will you come along, Shinobu?"

"Yeah, on that occasion I can buy a novel at the bookstore."

When I replied with a small nod, Machina, having heard our conversation, faced her somewhat worry filled eyes towards Elni.

"…Can I come along too?"

"Machina, I said we all, right?"

Slowly approaching Machina, Elni gentle petted her head and continued.

"Of course that includes you too, Machina. If you have no other plans, please come along. Luna and the others are getting ready right now. Shinobu, Machina— you too get ready in 40 seconds!"

When Elni added a joke at the end of her sentence, Machina giggled, nodded with a smile and headed for the door of the living room. She probably was going back to her room to get changed. When I watched her happily leaving with swift steps, Elni softly rested her hand on my shoulder.

"Shinobu, Machina must be a bit tired from the student council election and all. It's for a breather, so please keep her company today."

"Sure, I don't mind, but isn't it bad to leave her like that? She's still under hypnosis, right? When will it be lifted?"

"…If you take a proper look at her right now, you'll notice right away too."

Just replying so isolated, Elni left the living room like Machina.

On the other hand, I seriously pondered about Elni's word for some time while I started to get ready too, following the two of them…

Then riding the car driven by my mother, our whole family headed for the big department store. I had been there with Luna and Nazuna before. At that time I had bought Luna her requested choker, but that aside now. The big department store had general, electronic and book stores. It even had a game center and cinema. Thanks to today being Sunday, the stores were crowded with people.

Amidst that, Machina took my arm and was in a good mood. Corresponding, her voluminous breasts pressed onto my arm, which made me a bit restless, whereupon Luna, Nazuna and my mother showed bright smiles together for some reason. As a reprehensive of everyone, Elni gave Machina a warm-hearted look.

"Machina, we'll leave now, since we have something to do, but we'll call on Shinobu's cell phone when we're done. Until then have fun with Shinobu."

"…I can stay with Shinobu-oniisama?"

"Yeah. You can fawn on him all you want today again. Of course the same goes for us too. Once we're done, let's play together."

Gently smiling like the others, Elni stretched herself a bit and petted Machina's head. Seeing her like that made me smile and I softly called out to Elni.

"You really are like her older sister."

"I'm glad to hear that, but… someone like me can't become her older sister."

Filling her expression a tiny bit with sadness, Elni got away from me and Machina, then slowly walked away with the smiling others.

…Just what were they going to do?

I was a bit curious, but for now I decided to go around the department store together with Machina.

During that, together with her, I feasted my eyes on cute accessories, stimulated my heart by listening to music samples and got attracted to by-passing sexy older girl… Aw, ouch.

When I looked at the scantily clad older girl, even though it was cold, Machina lightly pulled on my ear.

It wasn't like I was fascinated by her, I was just wondering if she wasn't cold…

When I shifted my gaze with a wry smile, Machina adorably puffed up her cheeks while still clinging to my arm.

"…You have me, yet you ogled at another girl."

"She was rather sexy."

For now I responded with a joke, whereupon Machina wasn't really angry and just asked worried.

"Shinobu-oniisama, you like sexy girls like her?"

"Well, if I have to answer, then yes. An erotic and cool one isn't bad either."

"Erotic and cool? You like that type? Then the your favourite from all our girls is… Kaoru?"

"Well, she sort of falls into that category, but how should I say, everyone has it's own charm. To be honest, it's hard to say who is my favourite."

"Th- Then, what about me? Do you… like my type?"

"…Listen, it's embarrassing, so I'll only say it once."

I should tell her on this occasion. In order to answer her question, I looked into her eyes.

"I really like you. I consider you my family. Types and such don't matter. If anything happens, I'll properly protect you."

At the same time I declared so, my cheeks got hot and I tried to avert my gaze right away, but… Machina smiled so charming that I was unable to do so and was inadvertently captivated.

Dying her white cheeks with a rose-colour and happily narrowing her amber eyes,

"Thanks. I really love you too, Shinobu."

The words spilling out from her pink lips sounded somewhat lovely.

…She might have temporarily forgotten it from all the joy.

She herself didn't seem to notice and after a while she called me *Shinobu-oniisama* again, restarting the *act* while still holding my arm.

—If you take a proper look at her right now, you'll notice right away too.

Elni's earlier words. Now I finally understood the meaning behind her words and her heartfelt feelings.

…Elni must have wanted to let Machina act spoiled. And likewise, Machina must have wanted to act spoiled with us. Guessing from the feeling I had this morning, Machina's hypnosis from yesterday was already lifted without a doubt.

However, she pretended to be under hypnosis even now and didn't remove her soft body from my arm, but I refrained from pointing that out and kept her company for looking around the department store again.

Then, after I looked at some novels for a while at a bookstore we stopped by, I left the store empty-handed, whereupon Machina asked puzzled.

"Were you not going to buy a novel?"

"Well, I had planned to, but…"

"Do you have not enough money? Then should I buy it for you?"

"No, but I appreciate the offer. I just wasn't really interested in any. As for money, I still have some to spare. Should I buy you something on this occasion?"

"I, I would feel bad. You already bought me the cat-ear hat the other day. Only getting presents is—"

"Don't hold back. I'm getting a lot of things from you. For example, your tricked&retort combo."

Or a cute smile and heartfelt words. I was really getting a lot of things from her.

I couldn't tell her that directly, since it was embarrassing. But it didn't change my sentiment of wanting to do something for her when she acted spoiled. After I had cut into Machina's words, I filled my voice with my feelings.

"I just want to repay you for all the things you always give me. I'll give you something even better than the cat-ear hat. By the way, is there anything you want? Nothing all too expensive, but I'll see what I can do."

"…Are you sure?"

Machina asked timidly. When I replied with a firm nod, she smiled with "Thanks", then she pulled me on my arm with her eyes sparkling, as there was something she wanted. As we reached our destination, Machina picked *that* up and the moment she declared "I want this", I was kind at a loss for words from the surprise.

…What Machina had picked up was a punk chocker with a blue tartan pattern and a metallic lock. It was a differently coloured design from the one I gave Luna as a present.

E- Even if they were sisters, to think Machina would make the same request as Luna…

Even while I was completely agitated, I bought the chocker for now, whereupon Machina glanced at me embarrassed while flushing her cheeks.

“Shinobu-oniisama, that choker, put it on…”

“As you command, Queen Machina.”

Like told, I tried to put the purchased choker around my own neck, but

“H- Hey! Why are you trying to put it on yourself! Wasn’t it a present for me? Besides, I’m not a Queen!”

It was embarrassing, so I had replied with a joke, whereas Machina lightly puffed up her cheeks and even dampened her eyes a bit.

“Don’t be a meanie and properly put it onto me…”

“O- Okay, got it. Sorry.”

Even while I was agitated again by her reaction, I approached Machina and timidly reached out my hands to put the choker around her small white neck.

The faint fragrance of flowers hung in the air from her beautiful red hair and every time I lightly touched her neck with my fingertips, Machina leaked a sweet “Mm…” moan, so by the time I finished putting the choker on her, my earlier agitation had only grown stronger.

On the other hand, Machina happily touched the choker around her neck and showed me a sparkling smile.

“Thank you, Shinobu-oniisama. I want to do something to thank you. Saying anything you want me to do.”

“Guess I’ll ask one thing of you…”

Taking her offer, I softly told her my request after a short pause.

“Return to being your usual self already. You can fawn on us. All you want. But I still prefer your usual self. Return to your usual self, then fawn on me again. The hypnosis is already lifted, right?”

“….When did you notice?”

“To my shame, only just now. Elni probably noticed since this morning.

And my mother has a good intuition, so she might have noticed too."

Machina flickered her big eyes. Like I thought, the hypnosis was already lifted. Hearing my answer, she faintly dropped her voice with "I see…".

"Actually, last night already, when I saw your scar before taking a bath together, I felt something amiss. That feeling became stronger in my fight with Sister later and at that time I didn't notice it, but when I woke up in the morning… the hypnosis was gone already."

Making a small sigh, Machina continued with her dropped voice.

"Yesterday was really embarrassing, but I was so happy that I even wanted to thank Elni, so I wanted to keep it up a bit longer… I'm really sorry. I think my weird spoiled act troubled you guys."

"…We never considered it troubles. So you don't need to fool us with hypnosis, just honestly act spoiled if you want to."

"That's impossible… I'm not as kind as my sister. And not as cute as Elni and Nazuna, right? If something like me keeps acting spoiled, you'll come to hate me one day. Even in my childhood… it was like that. Because I was weak and acted spoiled, everyone left me. It's also my fault that my mother…"

Not saying anything more, Machina trembled her shoulders, cast her eyes down and shut her mouth.

While watching her expression, my chest started to hurt, but I suppressed it.

"Your family won't come to hate you."

I filled my tone with my feelings.

"You have your own charm. You too have your kind, cute and even strong sides. Even if you were to be weak, not honest or different from the others, all of that makes you you."

Slowly reaching out my hand for Machina,

"I like you like that. So do the others. I told you, you're my family. From now on, I'll never come to hate you."

I petted Machina's head to convey my feelings.

Upon that, Machina tightly hugged onto me.

"…I think of you as my family too…"

Trembling both her voice and body,

"Thanks, Shinobu…"

Machina spilled quiet tears in my arms at the same time she said these warm-hearted words. I would have never guessed that she would cry and thus I was surprised, but I kept holding her for some time while petting her head…

As the shame got to her, Machina's cheek were quite red, but my own were rather hot too and my face surely looked similar to hers.

Since we embraced each other in the middle of the department store earlier, the passing by people gave us odd glances and amongst them, some even gave us mocking words like "Hot! So hot, even though it's winter!", so Machina and I hastily left the place when we returned to our senses.

Then we strolled through the department store, which randomly led us to a cell phone shop. There were the other girls on their separated business. When I tried to call out to them upon noticing them, they noticed me before that and Luna, Nazuna and Elni started to panic for some reason. Unlike my mother, who showed a bitter smile, the three of them came rushing over to me.

"Wh- What a coincidence to run into you two here. As a consequence, do you want to look at western clothes or so together? If possible, right away, Machina!"

"I, I'll go with Luna-oneechan. You come too, Brother, Machina-oneechan. Especially you, Machina-oneechan, have to come with us as fast as possible!"

"I would like to check out the food samples— wait, no! A- Anyway, come with us, Shinobu, Machina! Only Machina works too, just make it quick!"

While leaking somehow agitated voices, they tried to keep Machina away from here.

…They said they had something to do, but just what was it?

While I doubtfully exchanged looks with Machina, my mother followed after the girls with hiding something behind her back and called out to Luna and the others with a wry smile.

"I know what you're doing, but you don't need to fool her that desperately. It's all ready already."

Along with her words, my mother held out what she had hid behind her back to Machina.

My mother was holding on… a slim cell phone.

“You don’t have one yet, right? This is a present for you, Machina-chan.”

“…For me?”

“Surprised, aren’t you? We kept quiet about it because we wanted to surprise you.”

My mother smiled happily and lightly rested her hand on the head of the nearby Elni.

“By the way, Elni had the idea. You two really are close. When we discussed the cell phone, Elni was serious for a change. She said that she wanted to give you a cell phone to make you happy.”

On these words, Elni smiled somewhat gentle and Machina flickered her eyes. Meanwhile my mother continued with her smile.

“You father is living overseas, right Machina-chan? You can make calls overseas with that phone, so from now on you can call and mail your father a lot, though it might get expensive.”

…My mother must have believed me and thought the Old Man Bram was living overseas. She didn’t know that he actually lived in the demon realm, nor that Luna and Machina were devils.

But, even if she were to notice it, my mother surely would accept them. My mother’s voice and expression was so warm-hearted that it made me think so.

“I’m sure you father told you to come back if you aren’t elected, because he’s worried about you in various ways. Nevertheless, even though this might just be my selfishness, I’ll tell you on this occasion.”

After lightly scratching her cheek a bit bashful, my mother filled her tone with warmth.

“As long as you want to, you can stay here, Machina-chan. I really want you to stay too. So if there’s anything I can help with in the election, just tell me, okay?”

Still smiling, my mother conveyed her feelings and Nazuna and Luna each embraced Machina with “I want to be with Machina-oneechan too” and “I will help with the election as well”, whereupon Machina spilled big tears, even though she just had stopped crying earlier.

"…I too… want to… stay with you…"

Halting her speech so it was hard to understand, she continued to cry with sobs for some time while being embraced by the two of them.

During that, Elni and my mother embraced her as well at some point, which got us odd glances from passers-by, but looking at my *family* kept warming my chest endless, so that ignored these glances.

Still, even while Elni blending in with the others, just her expression looked somewhat sad, which bothered me a bit…

* * *

The heartfelt holiday was over and while we were busy again with the election campaign, our classmates still gave Machina their full support.

The reason Asada came to school before anyone else was to secure the spot in front of the school gate for our greetings every morning. And whenever they got acquainted, he sometimes gathered information about our rivals together with Kaorun and apparently was working on something behind the scenes with the boys from class.

Also, even the girls of our class started to come to school earlier than Machina and me. At the morning, lunch break and after school they cross-dress me with the lead from Minami and accompanied Machina and me on our greeting sessions in turns.

On the other hand, Hijiri seemed kind of down.

The greatest rival to Machina was the current Vice-President, Himuro Kana-san.

Hijiri troubled the student council members by withdrawing her candidature not long ago and was originally in a position, where she had to help out Himuro-san to make up for it.

From what I heard from Kaorun during the campaign, Hijiri once lowered her head to Himuro-san and apologized that she couldn't help her, since she was supporting Machina.

However, we couldn't let Hijiri come out in the open and she herself understood why she had to work behind the scenes, but she once had made a regretful and bitter sigh with "Why did I announce my candidature back then? Even though it was an important time for Machina", as she really wanted to accompany us on the greetings. However, her sentiment to support Machina must have been really strong.

Together with Kaorun and Asada, she worked hard at the information hunt which she was unfamiliar with and lately seriously pondered about a speech, so that she at least could come out in the open for the support speech.

And the members of our family undaunted supported Machina too.

I believed Luna was trying to ease Machina's exhaustion as least a bit. Day by day, the lunchbox made by her became more extravagant and lately I often even saw Luna giving Machina a massage.

Meanwhile, Nazuna researched about the election together with her friend Mii-chan, whereas my mother wrecked her brains over campaign pledges and speeches. Both of them gave Machina all kind of advices.

Also, Elni always stayed with Machina and watched over her while she was at home. She relaxed the atmosphere with her usual jokes, earnestly listened to Machina and seemingly even sometimes slept together with her, as they shared a room anyway.

Lastly, there was a slightly surprising thing as well.

So far she had rarely done so, but now Elni often petted Machina's head and Machina accepted that somewhat happy. When I saw them like that, they appeared like sisters.

Still, even while Machina put her strength into the election campaign, she appeared somewhat weird.

Sometimes she showed a very sad expression and likewise, she didn't get as angry as before. The other day, she even clouded her expression when she was lovely caressing the choker I gave her. While I felt something amiss in the busy days, we continued our election campaign today as well and now it was after school.

After classes ended, I exerted myself until now by making the rounds to each club at school in my usual cross-dress together with Machina, Minami and Asada.

By the way, while we conducting our election campaign like this, our rival Himuro-san apparently did the same things as us and we passed each other numerous times in the hallway. Each time, she gave Asada and me a passionate glance, but… enough of that.

Finishing our rounds, Machina and Minami went off to the toilet, whereas I headed to the changing room together with Asada and quickly took off my cross-dress and make-up.

Afterwards it was planned to have a discussion about the election in the classroom with everyone from class.

That said, participation was voluntary and after school.

Those without club activities surely had gone home already and a lot probably couldn't attend due to club activities… So we might end up with a small number of members.

While I thought like that, the nearby Asada called out to me with a wry smile when I had removed my make-up and cross-dress.

"Somehow, you have really gotten used to it lately."

"Well, I'm cross-dressing nearly every day nowadays. Of course doing the make-up is out of the question, but I'll learn at least this much, even if I don't want to. I feel bad for troubling the girls over it too."

"…I see. Recently you complained how much of a pain it is to change clothes and just kept the cross-dress on for the day, but you actually wanted the girls to save time, huh."

"Because we're doing our campaign during lunch break and after school. It's a lot of troubles for the girls to make me cross-dress every time. Besides, their sexual harassment while they do so is a bit annoying."

"Isn't it more annoying to be mistaken for a female pervert when you enter the boy's toilet still in cross-dress?"

"…Don't bring that up."

But I had to endure it until the election was over. I wanted to do something for Machina too. Asada probably had the same feeling as me.

While he kept talking with me, Asada suddenly softened his tone.

"Still, you were so against the cross-dress, yet you accepted to easily when it was for Orangelo-san's sake. Seeing you so serious without complaining made me think that I should give my best too."

"That's what I should be saying. You're being serious for a change. Thanks to your and Kaorun's info, it was easier to make plans. And you're working behind the scenes with the guys from class, right? Just what're you doing?"

"I secretly made a fan club for Orangelo-san. Gogyou-san's older sister, Kaoru-san helped too, you know? The members for the fan club increase by the day, so it should get us some votes for the election."

"Machina's going to be embarrassed about it if she finds out."

"Well, guess so, but a fan club was only a matter of time. Even without our doing, a club would have been created in time. Because Orangelo-san is charming. That's why our class works so hard, isn't it?"

Still with a soft tone, Asada continued somewhat happily.

"Gogyou-san is getting us votes by speaking with the people from the Kendo club. And it looks like Minami and our class rep Katagiri are supporting Machina by respectively speaking with friends and other class reps. But well, lately… I'm a bit worried."

Dropping his voice a bit, Asada knitted his eyebrows.

"Somehow, isn't Orangelo-san a bit weird recently? Like she's strangely kind, lacks spirit, thanks the girls by taking their hands or does other things she usually doesn't do. I can't expression it well, but it's like…"

Like she was grieving over a coming farewell, might have Asada been trying to say.

Sure, Machina had hold my hand or hugged Nazuna without letting go before the election began and gently embraced Kaorun in front of the school gate on the first day of the election period.

These actions were ones that Machina would rarely do normally. However, they were happening a lot lately. Asada had a surprisingly sharp intuition. He might have felt something amiss and considered a few things. But without presenting any more of his thoughts, Asada changed his clouded expression into a smile.

"I don't know what Orangelo-san is troubled over, but for now we need to concentrate on the election. I want her to get elected at all costs."

"…You're really unusually serious."

"'Cause it's Orangelo-san. Of course I'll be serious. The girls in our class hate me as a pervert. But Orangelo-san is the same as Minami or Gogyou-san. She treats me as a friend. I'll do anything for my friends. That's my own way of the pervert."

Asada added a little joke at the end of the sentence. After I had removed my make-up, I left the changing room together with that nice pervert. There we ran into Machina and Minami, as they must have just returned. As soon as Minami spotted us, she smiled and Machina came over with a smile. Today again the choker I gave her was around her neck and Machina took my hand still smiling.

"Cross-dressing is fine, but your usual attire is still the best, Shinobu."

"I'm overflowing with wild charm, right?"

While I cracked such a joke, I dropped my gaze down on Machina's small hand that squeezed mine.

Even after the hypnosis from the other day was gone, Machina had started to make more physical contact with us family members than before, albeit a bit reserved like this.

I was sure that she was opening her heart to me, but like Asada, the unrest in my chest gradually grew stronger.

But I hid it and while walking down the hallway together with Machina, Minami and Asada, my thoughts wrapped around the later meeting with our classmates and I brought up a matter with a casual tone.

"It's all fine that we discussing with everyone, but I wonder how many will show up…"

"Yeah, it is after school. I think they're busy with club activities and such. For now we should give our best with the members we get."

Saying so, Machina put a bit of strength in her squeezed hand, whereupon Asada and Minami showed me a bittersweet smile together for some reason.

"Looks like you two don't know yet."

"Indeed. Your charm is quite something, Orangelo-san."

Along with their words, Asada and Minami each changed their bittersweet smile into a normal one.

On the other hand, Machina tilted her head puzzled for a while, as she didn't understand the meaning behind their words, but slowly she started to realize it.

When we slowly approached the classroom on the quiet hallway after school, we could faintly hear the voices of our classmates. And when we reached the door of the classroom, everyone's voices sounded dearly in Machina and my ears.

"…You see, with nothing to lose, I asked her to teach me. And even while looking annoyed with 'You're so hopeless', she taught me really detailed. Orangelo-san is really kind."

"Yeah. I thinks so too. I'm bad at sport, so I hated pairing up at P.E., because it always troubles my partner. But I never hated it with Orangelo-san. No matter what kind of mistakes I made, she neither got angry or fed up with me and gently gave me various advices. So I really like her."

Maybe the guys without clubs waited for us the whole time.

"You know, I was once picked on by the seniors in my club and felt like crying, but at that time Orangelo-san passed through by chance and helped me just because we're classmates. She seriously scolded the seniors and then went away like it was the nothing special. I couldn't thank her for it… So I want to pay her back now."

The guys with clubs must have come rushing over after abandoning their club activities.

While our classmates animated or bleared their voices, the stories about Machina I didn't know of continued and apparently even Kaoruna nd Hijiri were in the classroom.

"…All of you know sides from Machina that I do not. I am a bit jealous."

"Fufu, you really like Machina, Kaoru-san."

While these voices of Kaorun, Hijiri and our classmates reached our ears, Machina's hand, squeezing mine, was trembling lightly and she faintly blurred her amber eyes.

While I felt my chest get hot too, I softly called out to Machina.

"Seems like everyone is waiting."

"…It's… too good… to be true…"

Machina halted in her speech. Softly pulling her on her hand, I opened the door and looked through the classroom, whereupon there were all of our classmates present, without a single one missing.

…They all must considered Machina as important. Everyone came rushing over upon noticing her.

"Listen, Orangelo-san, I spoke to a lot of my seniors at the club. I think they'll vote for you. So praise me!" "Ah, not fair! I did the same!

Orangelo-san! Instead of praising, step on me!" "Scold me!" "I want you to chastise me!"

Each in their own way, they showed Machina their affection.

"Hey, calm down, everyone. We're having a meeting here." "Right. I know how you feel, but let's start the meeting quickly. Let's work hard for Orangelo-san, okay? No playing around."

All our classmates were smiling gently together and surrounded by them, showered with their warm-hearted words… Machina surely tried to hold it back.

She bit down on her well-formed lips, strongly squeezed my hand and kept enduring for a while by trembling her body, but then she raised small sobs.

"…Everyone… thank… you…"

The drops overflowing from her amber eyes spilled down from her cheeks and at last Machina cried.

Upon that, everyone panicked.

"Wh- What's wrong, Orangelo-san?" "Are you okay? Are you in pain?" "We can hold the meeting tomorrow too. Let's go to the infirmary when you don't feel well."

Each of them started calling out to her and Machina shook her head and replied while crying.

"…No… I'm just… happy…"

Spinning her words with a grazed voice

"I didn't think… you would do all this… for me…"

and endlessly spilling tears from her eyes,

"…that I couldn't be… like my mother…"

Machina quietly sobbed while trembling both her voice and body greatly.

Our classmates surely only understood half of her words.

Machina had admired her mother since her childhood. And our classmate gave her the feeling that she might have become like her admiration.

Even while showing surprise and confusion, these warm-hearted classmates stayed with Machina like me until she stopped crying…

Afterwards our classmates wrecked their brains during the meeting, as they wanted to do something for Machina, and discussed about the election. Since we were so many, it was somewhat noisy, but time went by relaxed.

Also, after Machina stopped crying, she smiled gently by looking at each classmate's face and kept that smile the whole time. After the meeting, we were on our way home.

Under the twilight sky, she walked besides me still smiling and remained silence for a while, but suddenly she stopped and said isolated.

"Hey Shinobu, everyone was… so kind."

"Because it was for you. Everyone likes you."

When I replied so smiling, Machina brightened her smile.

"It might sound conceited, but I think so too. I surely made them feel that way. They returned the kindness to me. Not just Shinobu and the girls, but all of our classmate came to like me too."

Contrary to the happiness in her voice, Machina smiled a little bit sad.

"When I see that, I feel like I have come a step closer to my mother, which makes me really happy. But, that's enough for me. It's more than enough, so, Shinobu…"

Her voice trembled faintly.

"It's about time… I return to the demon realm…"

Forcing a smile, Machina spilled tears from her eyes.

"Of course I plan to stay for the election. I want to win for everyone. But you know, when the election is over, I'll ask my father to… to alter… to make everyone forget about me. That's for… the best…"

"…No way it is."

Machina's voice trembled greatly. Mine trembled like hers too.

"Why are you saying that? There's no need to go back, right? You can just stay here."

"…No. I love… everyone too much…"

"Even more reason not to go then. If you love them, why would you—"

"—My mother passed away due to me."

Softly cutting into my words,

“Our warm house, our family, everything was shattered because of me.” she put on a smile like she had given up.

“In my childhood, I lived in the countryside with my mother and father. Back then we behaved like humans, so I had friends. But I always acted spoiled with them, so one by one they left me.”

Like recalling the past, Machina looked up a the twilight sky.

“I was sad about it and thought I was hated by everyone. I asked my mother for advice. She told me to treat everyone kindly, to become so strong that I could protect everyone and then they would return the kindness.”

…She really loved her mother.

When she spoke about her mother, Machina’s voice sounded really gentle.

“Like my mother told me, I tried to stop acting spoiled and treat everyone kindly. I tried to give my best… But it was no good.”

Along with a small sigh, Machina trembled her voice again.

“The place we lived in really was in the middle of nowhere, so when I played with the other kids, a wolf appeared. There were no adults nearby and my friends in danger, so I used my devil powers for the first time in front of them, even though my father had warned me not to.”

Most likely her friends didn’t live up to Machina’s expectations.

Machina cast down her eyes and clenched her fists a bit.

“I… didn’t want to hurt them. I wanted to protect them. And even though I managed to protect them… They didn’t return the kindness. Because it was exposed that I was a devil, the parents of my friends marched onto our house while my father was away…”

Just by imagining that, my chest wouldn’t stop hurting gravely.

“My mother protected my by hiding me in the closet right away. But I was too scared to do anything. I considered using my powers numerous times. But then the parents of my friends would notice it and if they were to get hurt, my friends would be sad, so while I was hesitant, my mother was…”

With her voice still grazed, Machina squeezed out the words.

“I could only shiver in fear, couldn’t protect my most precious person.

Because of me, everything shattered. I don't want that again. Therefore I'll return to the demon realm. I never again want to see a precious person get hurt because of me."

"…We won't get hurt because of you."

"The scar on your chest is because of me, isn't it?"

Denying my words, Machina shook her head a bit to the side.

"Hijiri's exorcist friend said it before. The exorcist organisation won't tolerate devils like my sister or me. They're still alarmed and it's more than possible that some kind of occasion will make them act."

Hijiri's exorcist friend must have meant Tachibana-san.

Previously, when Hijiri took her distance from me, Tachibana-san told us that the exorcist organisation was still wary of Luna and Machina. But back then, I had my hands full with my own stuff, so I wasn't able to notice why Machina, next to me, had been biting onto her lips, why she had been looking down or what kind of feelings she was having.

Even while I bit down on my lips in regret, I still called out to Machina.

"Hijiri is trying her hardest to make them tolerate you at the moment. One day I'll be an exorcist. I'll protect you two together with Hijiri. Therefore—"

"I'm a hybrid devil, you know?"

Softly cutting into my words, Machina forced a smile again.

"Unlike my sister, I'm the kind the exorcist hate the most. My powers aren't restricted in the human world and because I'm half human, the exorcist's skills are only half effective. Making them tolerate my sister would be one thing, but it's impossible for Hijiri right now to make them tolerate me."

Filling her expression with sadness, Machina still declared softly.

"Should the exorcist organisation act while they still haven't acknowledged me, I'm sure you and the other would protect me like my mother did. But if you guys were to get hurt because of me, if Nazuna or Tomoe-san were to get hurt in the commotion… what should I do then?"

Machina showed an expression like smiling while crying. I couldn't say anything to her.

"I love everyone, but no matter how hard I try, I just can't live in the human world. I'm a hybrid devil… So before anyone gets hurt before me, I have to return to the demon realm. I'm sure that's for the best."

I could only silently look at Machina, who filled her eyes with tears. Even while she wished to be with everyone, she could only drown that wish just because she was a hybrid devil and fearing that her precious people would get hurt, Machina tried to return to the demon realm. Unable to find anything I could do for her, I didn't know what to do.

"…Sorry."

Again, I bit down on my lips and clenched my fists.

I couldn't forgive my weak self. It was pathetic. Why was I so weak? If I had an absolute strength like my grandfather or father, if I had a strength to somehow protect everyone, Machina might be able to live in the human world with a peace of mind. If I only had the strength and confidence to protect everyone…

"Sorry, Machina. If I were as strong as my gramps or dad, if I were strong enough to protect not just you but everyone, you could have a peace of mind…"

"You're fine as you are, Shinobu."

Machina responded with a soft smile to me, who was at a loss for words.

"You're admiring your grandfather and father like I admire my mother, right? You might lack a bit of self-confidence and think you're weak, but you're wonderful as you are."

With a smile filled with tears,

"Always joking around, but sometimes being gentle and petting my head, you protected me. That's why I love you. Really love you…"

even while spinning her words gently,

"But you can forget about me… Always protect… my sister and the others… my family…"

Machina trembled her voice again. Her words were really gentle and really sad. My own extended hand only looked powerless and unable to hold it back, I shouted with a hoarse voice.

"I can't bear… you leaving…."

"You have my sister, right? Even without me, you still have my sister, so it'll be fine. I'm sure she'll stand by you."

"Still… I…"

"It's okay. I have the cell phone from Tomoe-san. My father said that calls are possible close to the barrier between our worlds, remember? I can call and mail you, so there's no reason to be… sad… We're family. Even apart… we'll be family, right?"

Wiping the tears from her eyes, Machina brought her trembling voice under control.

"And it's not like we'll be separated forever. You'll become an exorcist, right? I'm sure you'll pull it off. One day, you'll be at the top of the exorcist organisation and make them acknowledge me. At that time… call me back here."

Hugging onto me, Machina laid her feelings bare.

"I'll always wait for your call, Shinobu. Even if you become an adult or an old man, I'll always wait. I'll always wear the choker you gave me too. So, when I come back here…"

Looking straight at me,

"Stay with… me again… It's a promise, okay?"

Machina showed a warm smile, even with tears flowing down. To her, my precious family,

"….Yeah, it's a promise."

I could only reply so, I could only pet her head. That was so frustrating and pathetic that I strongly clenched my teeth and simply kept holding back the tears that shaped in my eyes…

Chapter 04: To the People I once hated so much

It could be that Machina was always trying to make memories.

I figured that she wanted to treasure the remaining time with us and stay with us as much as possible, so she became strangely kind, stopped being angry and resorted to physical contact. The reason she pretended to be under hypnosis surely was so that she could act spoiled with us at long last.

I didn't notice that. I couldn't notice what was troubling Machina. I had faith that Machina was stronger than me and thus tried hard to become like her mother to be able to live in the human world. I believed that… However, it seems like Machina will go back to the demon realm by her own will, like the Old Man Bram said.

Ever since I came to know about that the other day after school, I couldn't properly help her in creating memories anymore.

Once the election ends… Machina will leave.

With only that thought in my head, I couldn't put my back into the election campaign in the last few days. When I talked with Machina, my smile became stiff. No matter how hard I suppressed it, my chest wouldn't stop hurting and I couldn't even crack my usual jokes, yet alone pet her head.

Soon Machina will return to the demon realm.

The others probably hadn't heard about it from Machina yet.

Dinner time in our house. I couldn't see Elni today, but Luna, Nazuna, my mother and Machina's smiling faces filled the dining kitchen like always.

While eating, Machina showed a gentle smile and enjoyed a chit-chat with the others, calling out soft to Nazuna.

"Hey Nazuna, shall I give you a bit of my side dish?"

"Eh? I'm happy about it, but you don't really need to, Machina-oneechan."

"You like the fried ones, right? Here, open up wide~"

When Machina put the fried side-dish into Nazuna's mouth, my mother interjected playful.

"Lately Machina-chan sure has lost the 'Tsun' of her Tsundere."

"T- Tomoe-san, I'm not a Tsundere. I'm, well, Nazuna's older sister, right? That's why, ehm… this much is natural."

Machina flushed her cheeks a bit. Seeing that, Luna giggled, whereas only I bit down on my lips. Noticing me, Machina smiled a little bit sad, then suddenly shifted her gaze to the empty seat at the table.

"Anyway, I wonder where Elni went…"

"Mhm~ I am not sure about that."

On Machina's words, Luna lightly tilted her head.

"Just in case she called me that she does not need dinner, but she did not tell me where she was. Besides, Elni-chan often goes out in the morning lately.”

“Really? She didn’t stay at home like always?”

Machina asked puzzled, whereas Luna softly shook her head and replied.

“She would be back before you two came home. But while she usually ate dinner here, she now is away until dinner and will not say a word about what she is doing.”

“That’s unusual. I really wonder what she’s doing.”

Giving Luna such an agreeable response

“Somehow, the dinner feels a bit weird without Elni.”

and staring at Elni’s empty seat,

“…With only one less, it already becomes like this…”

Machina said isolated while flickering her eyes a bit, yet keeping her smile.

In time my own lips started to tremble by watching her. I slugged down my dinner and returned to my room.

Machina likely didn’t tell the others about it, because she wanted to keep seeing their smiles until the separation.

But she told me about it. Told me before anyone else. She conveyed her feelings to me. Told the weak me “You’re fine as you are” and “I love you”.

I could do nothing but give her an awkward smile.

…Was that all I could do?

I wanted to protected her, I told her that I would protect her, but could I only watch over her, unable to wipe away her unrest?

I wouldn’t mind stopping Machina, even if it shoul make the exorcists my enemy. But it was different for Machina. She was afraid of dragging her family into conflicts because of her. As long as that fear remained, she might not be able to live in the human world.

Before I noticed it, I had sat down on my bed and kept staring at the talisman in my hand.

If I become an exorcist in the future and struggle my way up to the top of the organisation, then I could make them acknowledge Luna and Machina.

Machina was wishing for that too. And in turn I promised it.

But how many years would it take to fulfil that promise?

Previously when Hijiri watched over my training, she told me I had a talent for it.

True enough I might have been born with a talent for an exorcist's power, even though I had none for martial arts. I could already simply move around the talisman, which was said to take a lot of time to master. Probably I was even able to use it during a fight.

Still, even so it wasn't an easy feast to climb up within the organisation. In fact, Hijiri couldn't make them acknowledge Luna and Machina yet. Even if I were to cooperate with her, it probably would take a couple of decades until we persuaded the organisation.

During that time, what would happen to Machina? She finally got closer to the classmates, yet she'll have to let go of that, just keep the memories of her family with her and continue to wait in the demon realm without us the whole time while trusting in the promise with me?

I wouldn't be able to bear that. I didn't want to give up. Didn't want to let go of Machina.

Therefore I kept thinking about a way to let Machina stay in the human world, but regretfully time only passed by without me coming up with anything and since I wanted to know more about the exorcist organisation now, I called Hijiri after a moment of pondering.

Shoving the talisman I was holding into my *pocket*, I then took out my cell phone, but Hijiri just wouldn't pick up her phone and when I thought about trying again later, I could hear Hijiri's voice with "Sorry that it took so long" through the phone.

"You need something, Shinobu-kun?"

"…Yeah, I want to talk about something. You got time right now? I can call again later if you're busy. You were occupied, right?"

"It's okay. I only carried Kaoru-san to her bed together with Shuu-kun."

Shuu-kun was the name of Hijiri's little brother. But why did she carry Kaorun to her bed together with him?

"Is Kaorun sick?"

"Not quite. You know, she worked really enthusiastic for Machina-san's election campaign. I think she's tired from that coupled with her house chores. Until just now we were working on the support speech, but she fell asleep midway."

"…You're not tired, Hijiri? You also have your hands full with the exorcist job, right?"

"I'm fine. Sometimes I certainly feel tired, but it's not worth mentioning. Same for Kaoru-san. No matter how tired she was from the campaign, she didn't complain even once. Normally she would joke about her dissatisfaction, but for a change she didn't even do that."

With a peaceful tone, Hijiri continued softly.

"I'm sure Kaoru-san likes Machina-san as much as I do. Machina-san has to return to the demon realm when she doesn't get elected, right?"

Neither Hijiri, nor Kaorun didn't know yet that Machina would return on to the demon realm out of her own will.

"Machina-san is a precious friend to both Kaoru-san and me. So we'll do anything possible to us. Tiredness is immaterial."

"…Thanks. Machina'll be happy to hear that too."

Hijiri ignorant to the actual situation. Her warm-hearted words tightly corded up my chest, but suppressing the trembling in my voice, I calmly started talking.

"Hijiri, I called you today because I wanted to ask something."

"Ask something? What is it?"

"It's about the exorcist organisation. Something has been on my mind. Well…"

After a small pause, I continued my words.

"They're still cautious of Luna and Machina, right? Of course I know that you're doing your best, but I guess it'll still take some time to make them acknowledge these two?"

"…Where does that come from? Why are you asking that?"

"Sorry, but I can't tell you. Still, please tell me."

"I have no reason to turn down a request from you."

An instant answer with a dignified voice. After a short pause, Hijiri made her tone somewhat serious.

"To be honest, it won't take so much time if it's just Luna-san. I told you already some time ago that Luna-san is a bit of a strange devil."

Reminded me, it was around the time when Luna and Nazuna started to have a fight? At that time Hijiri talked to me.

Devils influenced humans for better or worse. From Hijiri's point of view, there apparently was the possibility that Luna's influence altered my constitution so that it easily attracted devils.

While I remembered about that, I could hear Hijiri's voice through the phone.

"There are various means to deal with Luna-san. Even her devil's influence won't be a problem as long as you have a talisman. Moreover, Luna-san can live on without sucking people's blood or life energy. I believe that when you become an exorcist in the future, the organisation will leave Luna-san in your hands. But for Machina-san… it should take some more time."

"…Because she's a hybrid devil?"

"That's right. Machina-san's power as a devil is high. Kaoru-san is a hybrid devil like Machina-san too, but the organisation treats them like tools."

While replying to my question, Hijiri gradually dropped her voice.

"I'm trying my best to change that way of the organisation. But I still couldn't get them to acknowledge Kaoru-san as my family, so…"

"You mean it's pretty likely the organisation will act?"

"…I'm afraid so. But if comes to that, I'll definitely protect Machina-san. You'll do the same then, right? So I'm sure it'll be fine."

I appreciated Hijiri's feelings. However, it couldn't wipe away Machina's unrest. Hearing Hijiri's answer, I opened my mouth, albeit hesitant.

"Hey Hijiri, can't Sougo-san make them acknowledge Machina either?"

"My dad? Mhm… He certainly might be able to do that. But he quite pushed his claim to let Kaoru-san attend university already. I think his standing in the organisation would be at risk if he were to act for Machina-san now."

"…I see. Sorry for asking weird questions."

"I don't really mind, but… seriously, what's up, Shinobu-kun?"

Hijiri's voice had an anxious ring.

"Lately, you look a bit down, Shinobu-kun. Did something happen?"

"…No, nothing."

"Okay then, but I'll lend you an ear for anything, grumbling or worries.

We're in a, well, supporting relationship, right? Whatever it is, I won't consider it annoying when it's for you. So if something's the matter, please talk to me any time."

My heart was inadvertently swayed by that earnest voice. Sure, I might not be able to do handle it on my own. But I got the feeling that it was possible together with Hijiri. It seemed like I had found what I could do for Machina. Therefore, after a short hesitation,

"Hijiri, actually—"

"Ah, sorry, Shinobu-kun. Wait a sec. Looks like my dad came home. I'll go back to my own roo— Mh? It's Elni…"

I tried to discuss the matter with her, whereupon Hijiri's surprised voice spilled through the phone.

I knew that she went out, but why was Elni at Hijiri's place?

While I was doubtful, Hijiri's voice became a bit distant, as she was talking with Elni.

"Wh- Why are you with my dad, Elni? Eh? Ah, yeah. I'm on the phone with Shinobu-kun. Ehm, give me a moment."

Apparently the conversation with Elni ended. Her voice returned to the normal volume.

"Shinobu-kun, Elni wants to speak with you. I'll pass the phone over to her."

"Yeah, sure…"

What did she want? Still doubtful, I tilted my head, whereupon Elni's bright voice reached my ear through the phone right away.

"Yahoo, Shinobu. It's me."

"…Why are you over there? What were you doing until now?"

"Actually, Sougo treated me to dinner. I'm dropping by here for a bit on the way home."

Sougo-san treated you?"

Speaking of, I remembered that previously Sougo-san mentioned that he would like to have dinner with Elni.

But even if she didn't know about Machina's circumstances, I wanted Elni to be home at a time like this. I made a small sigh and called out to Elni.

"Hey Elni, you can have dinner with Sougo-san anytime. Right now it's an important period for Machina. At least have dinner with her at home."

"…I'm meeting with Sougo specially because it's an important time for her."

A complete turn-around from her bright voice. Elni changed her tone into a serious one.

"I was just thinking of calling you, Shinobu. I have something to tell you."

"Tell me? What is it?"

"It's important. Sorry, but come to the nearby Midorikawa park. Let's talk there."

It might be something she couldn't tell me over the phone. Elni's voice was unusually serious. It really must be important. For now I put the discussion with Hijiri on hold. I replied to Elni with "Okay" and hung up, leaving the house right away with my coat on.

Maybe because it was already a bit late?

On my way to the park, I didn't meet anyone under the moonlight and when I reached the meeting point Midorikawa park, a deathly silence filled the park.

…It was awfully silent. I couldn't even hear car noises from the neighbourhood and while feeling a bit doubtful, I proceeded deeper in by giving side-glances to the various playground equipments, whereupon Elni's voice faintly reached my ears.

"…Yeah… I'm fine… I definitely won't cry… I won't stop either… It's for… So, please…"

I couldn't catch her words well, but when I headed towards the voice, the peacefully flowing small river and the benches around it caught my attention. Elni was sitting on the bench, but… she was talking with someone over the phone for a while now?

Elni held her cell phone in her hands and as soon as she recognized me, she waved her hand a bit and stood up, but as whatever happened to talking with me, she started talking into the cell phone while giving me a side-glance.

"—Fufufu, Machina, I got your beloved Shinobu. If you want him back… Ah, you could tell it was a joke? I see. Actually, I'm at the nearby park together with him."

Contrary to her joking tone, Elni's expression was somewhat stiff.

"I think you know it, Machina, the Midorikawa park. If you want, join us on a stroll? There's something I want to show you. Yeah. Okay, we'll wait."

Elni ended the call with a still stiff expression. In regards, I approached her with my head tilted.

"Hey Elni, if you planned to call over Machina from the beginning, why didn't you tell me about it? Actually, wasn't it important?"

"I'll finish that before Machina shows up."

Replying quietly, Elni looked into my eyes after a short pause and brought up a matter.

"….Seems like Machina will return to the demon realm."

"You knew?"

I inadvertently widened my eyes.

"I share a room with her, you know?"

Elni continued her words quietly.

"She must have thought I was sleeping. One night before the election even started, Machina was crying alone by muffling her voice. So I vaguely noticed it. I heard it directly from her just the other day."

Completely breaking her usual smile, Elni bit down on her lips.

"I already knew that she'll return, yet I couldn't stop my tears when she told me it. But, I can't stop her."

Tightly clenching her fist,

"I knew it… I can't become her older sister. I just can't. Even so Machina embraced me and told me happily."

Elni squeezed out the words with a sad expression.

"That she would always wait until you call her back to the human world. That she promised you and would see us all again. But I don't need… such a promise. After all, that promise will just become pointless."

"Don't say that. To Machina and me, it's an important promise."

I interjected softly, whereas Elni shook her head and denied.

"It's impossible for you to fulfil that promise, Shinobu. Even if you manage to fulfil it, it'll only pain Machina. That's why I actually don't want to do this…"

Slowly breaking off her words,

"—Sorry, Shinobu."

Elni smiled sadly.

It happened at the same time. Suddenly I heard a sharp wind noise, only to feel a strong impact on my body next. I instantly guarded myself with my arms, but while I rolled over the ground, I saw the Old Man Bram in the sky with his pitch-black wings spread, not knowing how long he had been there.

He slowly descended onto the ground and Elni took her distance from us with her still warped smile.

…What was going on? I didn't comprehend the situation at all. When I threw him a confused glance, the Old Man raised the corners of his mouth to respond to my doubt.

"I heard most of it from Elni. Seems Machina is quite fixated on you and made some stupid promise with you."

Heard from Elni? Why did Elni talk to the Old Man? While my doubt grew even greater, I raised my tone a bit to disagree.

"Old Man, I don't know what you heard from Elni, but stop deciding things on your own. The promise with Machina isn't stupid."

"No, it's beyond stupid. There's no way a hybrid devil can live in the human world. No matter how much kindness she tries to give them, humans will just betray and hurt her."

Lightly shaking his head, the Old man continued his words.

"Just like with Satya, she'll lose something precious again. If that were to happen, Machina wouldn't be able to recover from it this time. She's a really weak girl. Before that happens, I'll take her back to the demon realm right away."

"…Weren't you going to wait during the election?"

"Waiting got me this. She made stupid promise with you. Machina can only live in the demon realm. I thought she was aware of it, but seems I was wrong. It's necessary to remind Machina again what will happen to humans around her."

"…You want to waste me?"

"I won't take your life. But be prepared to lose a limb or two. Machina should stop having stupid ideas once she sees you all crippled."

Stupid ideas…? Anger gradually dwelled up inside me and I shifted my gaze towards Elni.

"Don't tell me you agree with the Old Man?"

"…Cell phones sure a convenient."

Holding out the cell phone in her hand, Elni stifled her expression.

"With one of this, I can talk with Bram. I can even arrange a meeting. I told Bram about Machina. This is the best for her. She should just live happily in the demon realm."

"You want to hurt Machina as well?"

"I just don't want to hurt her any more than this. I asked Sougo to clear the area. Soon Machina will come here alone. That'll lead her to see you injured because of her. Then it's farewell. I don't think she'll ever come back to the human world."

"Don't screw around, Elni."

During dinner, Luna had said that Elni often went out somewhere lately, didn't eat dinner with us for a change either and wouldn't tell what she was doing.

…Of course she didn't tell Luna. Because she talked to Bram behind our backs and met with Sougo-san to clear the area, thus plotting to hurt Machina. Before I noticed, my tightly clenched fists started to tremble and I called out to Elni with a cracked voice.

"Why Elni? Why do you—"

"Enough talking. I'll finish this before Machina shows up."

Cutting into my words, the Old Man unleashed numerous wind bullets. They came flying at me with a sough.

Unlike the previous time I fought with him, they had an incredible power. Was it the effect from his familiar that mimicked his left arm? The bullets were fast, heavy and endless.

A storm of never-ending bullets hailed down on me. Kept in check and unable to move properly or ward them off, my body was bombed with bullets and I started to feel a sharp pain and heat. But even when I closed the distance while getting hit by the bullets regardless of that, the Old Man spread the wings on his back and played a cat-and-mouse game with me.

…I didn't see a chance to win. With no time to come up with a tactic, I eventually fell down forward without my fist reaching the Old Man even once, just repeating my rough breath.

The Old Man looked down on me and like torturing me, he slowly attacked my arms, legs and back with bullets. Receiving these continuous attacks, I became unable to bear it and raised a short groan.

"……What're you doing, Father."

Machina's small voice that resembled a shriek reached my ears.

She surely trusted Elni's call and came because she wanted to treasure the time she had left with us. That was why I didn't want Machina to see me like this.

Me crawling unsightly on the ground. Even if I tried to somehow get up, I couldn't muster any strength and while I wanted to crack an usual joke, only a small cough and red drops spilled from my lips instead.

Even so I just formed a smile, whereupon Machina's expression warped so much that she might start crying any moment.

"Why are you hurting Shinobu? Is this what you wanted to show me, Elni?"

"…Now you should understand, Machina."

Still stifling her expression, Elni replied quietly.

"Shinobu is weak. He isn't strong enough to keep the promise with you. You won't be able to return to the human world. Just think about living happily in the demon realm."

"Why are you saying that, Elni? Shinobu isn't weak. He'll properly keep the promise with me. Shinobu is really strong—"

"Shinobu isn't strong! If he's, why's he crawling on the ground right now! It's because he's weak! He doesn't stand a chance against Bram! There are plenty of exorcists stronger than Shinobu! He can't protect you as well! He isn't strong enough to protect everyone!"

Elni's screaming sounded somewhat like a crying voice.

"Shinobu is actually weak! Even you hurt him before, Machina! He's just pushing himself to appear strong! Luna and Hijiri try to support him, since he's like that! But you're different, Machina!"

Looking into Machina's eyes, Elni trembled her voices.

"You're just trying to run away without supporting him! You're just depending on him by pushing an impossible promise on him! You have no right to stay by his side! Don't force everything on Shinobu! Don't make him suffer any more!"

Still trembling her voice, Elni faced her damp eyes towards me.

"Same goes for you, Shinobu! Don't make a promise you can't keep! You won't be able to keep it anyway! Even if you convince the exorcist organisation! Do you know how much time it takes until she comes back to the human world? What will happened to Machina while she keeps waiting all alone?"

Letting tears spill out of her blurred eyes,

"She keeps waiting without seeing the others grow up! When she gets back, everyone will have changed! They will have aged! Once she leaves, there's no longer a place for her! That's why such a promise is unnecessary! It's not needed!"

With a hoarse voice, Elni raised a bitter scream.

"If you can't do anything about it at the moment! Then don't disguise it with such a promise! Don't sadden Machina by tying her down to that promise! You can't make her happy with it! It'll just leave a lingering affection! Machina should just live happily in the demon realm! Don't push yourself when you're actually so weak!"

…Just like Elni had said, I was weak beyond help. My body was covered with scars in all sizes. It got them from training my body, from not living up to the expectations of my grandfather and father and from matches with other schools.

When we played at the river near the summer house of my grandfather or at the seaside school, Elni had seen the scars on my body. Seeing them, she must have realized too.

That I got scarred because I was weak.

As a matter of fact, my grandfather and father barely had any scars on their bodies, despite having fought many matches with other schools. That made me realize the difference between a genius and an average person. But even as weak as I was, I wanted to protect my precious people and tried to become stronger.

Yet, still weak, I lay on the ground and couldn't get up. While Elni closed her mouth, the Old Man looked at me.

"Seems Elni is done. Sorry, Nanjou. It's for Machina's sake. I'll crush you like planned. Machina, watch closely. As long as you remain in the human world, the same thing will repeat.”

Along with his words, the Old Man launched wind bullets again. In regards, I just clenched my back teeth without being able to say anything back to him, glaring at the bullets coming at me, whereupon

"Elni, Father, stop saying whatever you want."

The bullets, coming as far as in front of my eyes, suddenly disappeared with a shrill noise.

Shockwaves had clashed with each other. The wind bullets Machina released cancelled out Bram's, whirling up a light wind in the perimeter. I widened my eyes a bit and shifted my gaze like that, whereupon Machina looked straight at the Old Man while small tears dwelled up in her amber eyes.

"I love both you and Elni. I know that you're worried about me. But that's not a reason to hurt Shinobu! And Shinobu isn't as weak as Elni makes him out to be!"

Raising a loud voice, Machina shifted her gaze to Elni.

"Sure, Shinobu might have been weak at first. I know that he was called a 'failure' like me. But he didn't give in. He always tried hard to become like his grandfather and father. Specially because he tried so hard while knowing his own weakness, he's plenty strong and kind now."

Still facing Elni, Machina filled her tone with affection.

"Shinobu didn't care that I'm a hybrid devil. He told me that he would protect me. Both Nazuna and he called me family. Because of that I made a promise with him."

"…Didn't you just push your own selfish wish onto him?"

Elni objected with trembling lips, whereas Machina replied quietly.

"Might be. But when I return to the human world, I plan to offer my everything to Shinobu. I'll do anything for him."

"You plan to keep waiting in a world without Shinobu and the others? You don't even know how long it'll take for him to keep the promise."

"Even so, I don't mind. Even if my time together with them is short, I just have to do everything I can during it. Even if I should only be able to say good-bye at their dying bed, I'll give my all for their kids, a new family."

"…What if something happens to Shinobu while you're gone?"

"I'm his family. I can rush over from the demon realm any time."

“What about supporting him like Luna and Hijiri?”

“If it’s within my power, I definitely won’t hesitate to help.”

At some point, the tears disappeared from Machina’s eyes. Replying to Elni with a strong determination in her eyes, she then directed these eyes at the Old Man and decisively said “Therefore,”.

“if you plan to hurt Shinobu any further, I won’t even forgive you, my father.”

“…What can you do?”

Eluding Machina’s eyes, the Old Man declared coldly.

“When Saty was killed by the humans, you couldn’t do anything. You were only shaking. How can you do anything like that?”

“I can. If it’s for Shinobu, I can do anything. Don’t assume I’m the same as in the past. I’m not spoiled anymore.”

“…Why don’t you get it? The promise with Nanjou itself shows that you’re spoiled. You haven’t changed at all from your childhood. Unable to protect what’s precious to you, I only act spoiled.”

“Even I want to protect everyone! But someone might get hurt because of me! That’s why I‘ll return to the demon realm! It’s the only way how I can protect everyone!”

“—Wrong!”

Along with a sharp voice of anger, the Old Man merciless released bullets towards Machina.

“Like Elni said, you’re only running away. Only acting spoiled. As long as you’re like that, you can’t protect anyone.”

Machina was hit by a bullet on her delicate shoulder and was blown off a bit. Glaring down on her, the Old Man declared like spitting out.

“Right now you can’t protect anyone again. Just like in the past. See, nothing has changed. All you can is watch, isn’t it?”

“…No… That’s not true.”

Even while grimacing from the pain, Machina stood up firmly.

And the same time, a wind whirled and numerous wind bullets formed around her. Their count was slightly greater than the ones created by the Old Man. However, the Old Man’s expression still showed composure and he responded by launching his own bullets towards Machina.

…Handicapped from being in the human world, the Old Man might be inferior to Machina in terms of pure power. But there was a difference in experience. The Old Man exceeded Machina by far in handling the power.

Unshrinking firing the bullets into the ground and blocking Machina's view with a cloud of dust, he used that chance to fly into the sky and release multiple shockwaves. Moreover he gave Machina the run-around by skilfully mixing in feints into his attacks and freely controlled the bullets like they were a part of his body.

…Just what was I doing?

As the battle unfolded, Machina was hit on her shoulders, legs and arms by bullets and each time she was sent flying onto the ground. Even while seeing that, Elni only trembled her clenched fists and didn't say anything.

Meanwhile, Machina stood up numerous times and didn't give up, not flickering her amber eyes that still had her strong determination once.

…Why did Machina go so far? Even with her elbows and knees bleeding, she kept getting up staggering… Why? For whom?

The answer was obvious.

"I'll, protect Shinobu…!"

Triggered by Machina's words, my whole body filled with strength.

The dark ground I was crawling on was enlightened by the radiant moonlight.

Even now I felt a creaking pain in my body, but my chest was so hot that it didn't bother me.

Responding to my will, the talisman in my pocket started to glow.

—I had no doubts.

Since my childhood, I had admired my grandfather and father. No matter what scorn I received from others, I kept working hard to be like them. I decided to only fight with the Nanjou school like they had done, no matter what opponent I faced.

That was my obstinacy. Carrying an inferior complex and envying others, I was cheered up and always strengthened by… my precious pride.

But I no longer needed it.

Neither the feeling that had dwelled up within me so far, neither my admiration for my grandfather and father, nor myself that treasured that. I could throw away all of that. I had something more important than that. My burning hot chest. That was my everything.

—You're fine as you are, Shinobu.

Suddenly the words Machina told me floated in my head. The heat in my chest increased. This heat instantly spread all over my body. If I didn't protect Machina now, then when?

Before I noticed it, the pain was gone from my body. Grabbing the talisman, I stood up and kicking the ground I leaped at the Old Man with a roar. As he had already judged me to be unable to move, the Old Man widened his eyes in surprise when he noticed me. But only for a moment.

"Don't get in the way!"

Without interrupting his battle, the Old Man launched several bullets at me and I immediately erased them by putting strength into the talisman. Right away the Old Man widened his eyes again, but his attacking hand didn't falter. The count of the bullets was too great after all. Several bullets suddenly changed their trajectory and came at me from the back. I couldn't dodge them. While I felt a shiver,

"…Don't make me repeat myself, Father. I told you that if you hurt Shinobu any further, I wouldn't forgive you, my father."

Machina released several shockwaves. They sharply roared and smashed up the bullets that had closed into me without a trace left. …How reliable. Despite this situation, my mouth naturally formed a faint smile. I casually called out to Machina while still smiling.

"Machina, sorry, but can I leave the defence to you?"

"Yeah, sure, Shinobu."

"Okay, thanks… BadMachicat."

"SO BAD— wait, what're you making me do! Don't joke around at a time like this! Take it serious!"

"My bad. I'm a man that has to joke at all times. Quite cool, isn't it?"

"…When you take the jokes too far, you'll lose the affection of my sister."

"S- Somehow I get the feeling that the Old Man told me something similar before."

After lightly shrugging my shoulders, I corrected my tone with “Let’s go, Machina” and confronted the Old Man again.

The talisman would probably only last for a couple more times. But when I was with Machina, the Old Man’s bullets were nothing to be afraid of. I broke into a heavy run and closed in to the Old Man.

However the Old Man didn’t allow that and showered me with wind bullets. Shockwaves grazed my body and pierced my left shoulder. But I disregarding my defence without hesitation. The Old Man’s bullet never hit a vital spot. Machina protected me.

The damage was kept to a minimum. I wouldn’t collapse from a trivial bullet. My body, having surpassed his limits once, was filled with heat and wouldn’t stop either.

I closed the distance to the Old Man in less than a few minutes. The Old Man showed impatience in his expression, as he disliked that, and tried to take his distance from me by spreading the wings on his back, but

“—Guh.”

Machina’s launched bullets seized his body and sealed his movements. Not wasting that opening, I stepped in fiercely.

“ROOAAR!”

Driving in the carpus of my right palm with all my might, I thrusted the carpus of my left palm right afterwards, wrecking the insides of his body. Receiving that, the Old Man spitted out blood from his mouth along with a short groan, but this much wouldn’t stop him.

Not to forget his familiar that mimicked his left arm. I considered to pursue him at once, but he was Luna and Machina’s father. When I opened my fist that had grown hesitant,

“—That’s enough! Stop it, Shinobu!”

Elni had watched in silence until now. She raised a screaming-like voice.

Upon that, the Old Man smiled faintly and showed a wry smile while staggering, looking at me with somewhat warm-hearted eyes.

“Geez… What are you stealing the spotlight from Machina for? I thought I had crushed you completely, but just how tough are you? Why did you stood up again?”

“To crush you, of course.”

“Haha, are you really human? You stood up after eating my attacks and even used a talisman in the end. Truly a man that goes against my expectations."

Showing a smile for a change, the Old Man slowly shifted his gaze towards Machina.

"…This time you managed to protect it, Machina."

The Old Man showed a soft smile. When I saw him like that, it seemed like he wished for this outcome and while I was doubtful, Elni interjected softly.

"From the beginning, Bram had no intentions to take Machina back to the demon realm either. He was just waiting for Machina to rebel against him. That's all."

"Me, rebel? What do you mean, Father? You hurt Shinobu for such a reason?"

Unable to comprehend the situation like me coupled with some anger, Machina made her tone rigid, whereupon the Old Man made a small sigh and explained.

"Remember how I was against it when you tried to chase after Luna to the human world? I thought you would come back right away anyway. However, while I read the letters you sent me, I came to reconsider my opinion before noticing it. Your letters were… filled with a lot of sentiments."

Narrowing his eyes somewhat gentle, the Old Man continued softly.

"A strange human that said he would protect me, a hybrid devil. My beloved sister is by my side. I came to think of the stupid girl I hated at first as an older sister too. There's an existence like an adorable and lovely little sister. Likewise a mother figure that supports everyone. All of them treat me like a family. I even managed to get friends…"

Indifferent to the lightly blushing Machina, the Old Man slowly quoted the contents of the letters.

Like the Old Man had said, the letters overflowed with feelings towards Luna, Elni, Nazuna, my mother, Hijiri Kaorun and me. While Machina turned more and more red, the Old Man declared quietly after stopping his words once.

"Machina, you're indeed a devil. But you have humans staying by your side that don't mind that fact just like Satya. While you're surrounding by such people, just what are you doing? As soon as you got to know that the exorcist organisation doesn't acknowledge you, you sent me a stupid letter asking if it were better to return to the demon realm. Have you forgotten what Satya taught you?"

"…I have not, forgotten it. Treat everyone kindly. Become strong enough to protect everyone. Then everyone will return the kindness—See?"

When Machina spoke out her mother's words, the Old Man nodded satisfied.

"They returned the kindness to you, didn't they? You have changed. As you are right now, you can live on in the human world. Just as Satya had predicted."

"…Mother did?"

"Yeah, when you were still a baby, she often said: Machina is a hybrid devil, neither devil or human. But depending on herself, she can become either devil or human. I believe one day there will be people that accept Machina as their family."

"But I still…"

"I won't allow you to return to the demon realm, Machina. Protect your own place by yourself. In the human world, you have powers on par with mine. Nanjou shouldn't have been able to defeat me on his own. But you were there. You protected him. This time you were able to pull it off, right?"

Machina hesitated to speak, whereas the Old Man spun his words softly.

"From now on, you just have to keep protecting everyone like that. Even if something happens, you just have to be strong enough to protect your home. Don't let Nanjou push himself on his own. Don't run away resigned. What's the use of only getting protect when you actually have the power? Are you fine with that?"

"That's…"

"…Well, in the past I was just like you. I once bid my farewell to Satya. Then she scolded me with 'Life without you has no meaning', 'I will protect you' and 'So please protect me as well'."

The Old Man smiled dearly, yet somewhat sad.

"In the end I couldn't protect her, but I don't regret staying with her. A human life is short. If you leave them now, you'll regret it."

"…You think I can protect them?"

"You won't end up like me. You're blessed with good friends and a wonderful family. Nanjou is with you. It quite irritates me, but as long as you have him, there won't be a problem."

Hearing the Old Man's feeling, Machina faltered a bit and looked at me.

I had already decided what to tell her.

"Machina, stay here. I don't want to lose you. One day I'll be strong enough to protect you, protect everyone. So stay here until then. Can you protect everyone together with me?"

When I firmly strained my voice to convey my feelings, tears dwelled up in Machina's eyes and during that, Elni, who had watched over us, softly opened her mouth.

"Machina, you don't need to worry about the exorcist organisation. I asked a favour of Sougo. He should be working on making them acknowledge you. I'm sure he can pull it off. So you can rest assured."

"…Sougo-san is going to such length?"

Certainly a bit surprised, I shifted my gaze to Elni.

"If Sougo-san acts now, his position will…"

"I don't know if it's true or not, but Sougo apparently considers to retire soon. He plans to leave all family matters to Hijiri."

"…Is that so?"

"I think he's lying out of consideration to me. Sougo is an important friend. Even when he's avoiding me, he listens to any request of me. I feel bad about it, but it's for Machina's sake. I had no time to waste."

While saying so, Elni knitted her eyebrows and showed an expression close to tears.

"Sorry, Shinbou, Machina. I said all these cruel things to you two. But I didn't think I could change Machina's mind otherwise. I'm really sorry."

Blurring her big eyes with tears, Elni spilled numerous apologies.

In regards, Machina and I looked at each other, then each replied to Elni with a smile.

"Elni, there's no need to apologize. If anything, I'm grateful to you."

"Exactly. Thanks to you and my father, I was able to notice my mistake. I couldn't have noticed it on my own, but… I was indeed running away.”

With a clear and soft expression,

“But I won’t falter anymore. I’ll stay with everyone. I’ll protect them too. That includes you of course, Elni.”

Machina filled her tone with warmth and smiled at Elni.

“Thanks for taking up this hard role for my sake, as I was lost. Also thanks for even handling the exorcist organisation. Thank you for always staying with me and supporting me. I really… love you, Elni.”

“…These words alone… are enough for me.”

Even while trembling her body, Elni held back her tears and smiled.

Amidst that, the Old Man, watching us, made a deep sigh and opened his mouth.

“Still, I didn’t expect it to take so much time. Originally the plan was to urge Machina to return to the demon realm, which would make Nanjou flare up at me. Then I would crush him, which would make Machina challenge me. Lastly I tell Machina if she had forgotten Satya’s teaching. Yet…”

Making another sigh and throwing a glance at me, the Old Man continued his grumbling.

“Your sister unexpectedly flared up at me, Machina got a chocker from you while I waited and in the end you even exchanged an annoying promise. Good grief… Who knows what would happened without Elni.”

…The Old Man had worried a lot about Machina as well.

Now I felt bad for hitting him. Embracing that guilt, I suddenly felt a doubt and called out to Elni.

“Still, I’m surprised you could tell what the Old Man was thinking.”

“Remember how I said quite while ago that Bram had a guardian spirit? That guardian spirit is his wife. When Bram came over, I heard most of the circumstances from her. But Bram’s plan wasn’t proceeding as he wanted…”

“So you helped him out, huh.”

…Speaking of, Elni had said that she needed to talk to Satya when Bram came over to our house. Since then, Elni knew of the Old Man’s feelings.

But Machina had strengthened her resolve to return to the demon realm, so Elni had to do something and while she felt bad about it, she had asked Sougo-san for help and even played the scapegoat to make Machina notice something important.

"…Thanks, Elni."

Naturally relaxing my cheeks, I gently petted Elni's head, then looked at the Old Man.

"All that earlier was an act by you and Elni, right? For that you were rather serious. Hold back a bit, seriously."

As I relaxed from the relief, my body suddenly started to hurt. I got all dizzy. I must have long crossed my limit. Impressive that I could endure it for so long. I had given him somewhat barbed words, but

"I went easy, but just on Machina. For you it's different."

The Old Man smoked the cigarette he had taken out and replied grumpy for some reason.

"I'm giving both my daughters to you, so bear with it."

"…Both daughters? What do you mean?"

"Looks like you don't know it. I'll use this opportunity to enlighten the idiot. The chokers Luna and Machina wear around their neck has a special meaning for female devils."

"Aren't they just an accessory?"

"No. To say it in human terms, it's… like an engagement ring. Machina put it on and said she would wait forever for you calling her back to the human world. Even with maggots in your brain, you should know what that means."

"…From the shock, I stopped thinking…"

"Don't! Keep thinking! Why are you closing your eyes! Hey! Are you listen… Mh? Did he, faint?"

"Sh- Shinobu! What's up? Are you okay? Hang in there… Yeah, he isn't responding at all. Wh- Wha- What do we do, Elni!"

"C- Ca- Calm down, Machina! Panicking won't solve anything! I'm sure he's just tired from using the unfamiliar talisman! For now, an ambulance! We have to call an ambulance!"

"…Nanjou won't kick the bucket so easily. Settle down, you two. It doesn't look like his life is in danger. Okay, I'll carry him back— Guh! H- He just hit me! He's actually awake, isn't he!"

No, I was already done for. My consciousness was hazy. My body was as heavy as lead. While hearing everyone’s panicked and bright voices, I relieved let go off my consciousness…

* * *

Brilliant silver twintails in the corner of my vision. Whatever she was making, Elni was busily working on something on the table in my room. After giving her glance while I lie on my bed, I looked at the bandages around my arms and legs and sighed.

Scratches, lacerations, sprains and bruises. I didn’t break any bones, but my body still hurt all over.

That probably was the reason for the others, with Luna at the centre, to forbid me to go out as soon as they saw my wounds after the fight with the Old Man Bram.

By the way, afterwards the Old Man left with the words that he would stay in the human world until the selection ended, but that aside now.

An early afternoon, where I originally was supposed to attend class at school. Because of my house arrest, I couldn’t help with the election campaign and spent my time completely bored on my bed.

Of course I understood that they worried about me.

The past few days, Luna nursed me non-stop, but she couldn’t take off from her part-time job forever. Today Luna left the role of watching over me to Elni and went to her part-time job earlier. Fortunately my mother was out of the house too.

…Now was the only chance to slip out. Lazing around like this for days would make my body dull. Elni was still busy. I called out to her with a casual tone.

“Hey Elni, wanna go play for a bit now? If you want, I’ll treat you to something. It’s cold, so how about some Taiyaki?”

“Muh, I’ll never react to bribes!”

Stopping her work, Elni frowned a bit.

“You’re gravely injured, Shinobu. You properly have to rest. I mean, once you’re outside, you’ll just train your body again behind my back anyway.”

"I want to challenge my limits. I'm at an age where I prefer danger over boredom."

"If you want danger so bad, kiss Kaorun in front of Luna."

"Wh- What a dreadful thing to suggest…"

While I was inadvertently overwhelmed, Elni suddenly made a face close to tears and said.

"…You got injured because of me. Even if it was for Machina's sake, I made you go over your limits. I'm really sorry. I know it must be hard not being able to help Machina with her election. But please, don't overdo it… any more with that body."

"O- Okay. I definitely won't go outside. I'll rest at home. I can even promise you that. So from my side as well, please, don't make such a face."

Elni looked like she would cry any moment. She must have felt responsible. Elni's tears were as powerful as Luna's smile. I gave up and laid down on the bed, whereupon Elni made a sigh of relief and immersed herself in her work again. While watching her absent-minded, I asked nonchalant.

"Elni, what are you doing there?"

"This? It's a bracelet made from beads. It's my power and feelings in it, so won't just be an accessory, but a good charm."

"You have really skilled fingers. By the way, what kind of effect has that charm?"

"Well, if you put it on, you will no longer be under a devil's influence. It's way more powerful than a talisman."

Her tone was bright, but I got the feeling that her expression looked somewhat clouded.

"Luna seems to a slightly unusual devil. By staying with her for long, her devil's influence can affect people's constitutions. But with this charm, there shouldn't arise any problems. I'll make a lot of it and give them to Luna and you."

"…I see. Thanks, Elni. I'm sure Luna'll appreciate it too."

"After all that's all I can do."

Indeed dropping a shadow over her expression, Elni resumed her work. For a while I watched her, but since I was bored, I took out my textbooks and killed time with studying. Before long the evening sun shone in through the window.

…Already this late, huh. I was still bored to no end, whereupon there was suddenly a knock on the door and Machina showed up in her school uniform, as she had just returned from school.

Upon that, Elni stopped her work and stood up.

"Machina, my anime starts now, so look after Shinobu in my stead in the meantime."

"Yeah, okay, Elni. Take your time. I have to talk to Shinobu for a bit."

Nodding and replying to the leaving Elni, Machina faced me. In regards, I lightly scratched my head and called out to her.

"Sorry, Machina. It's an important period, but I can't help out with the campaign…"

"You don't have to worry about that. You helped me plenty already. Rest assured, I'll definitely get elected."

Her amber eyes were filled with a confidence that fascinated me. Still looking at me with these eyes, Machina came over to the bed and sat down besides me. And after she showed a hesitating behaviour, she timidly started talking.

"Hey Shinobu, on a different note, there's actually something I wanted to tell you for a while."

"Tell me? I believe my zipper is properly closed."

"Th- That's not it. Listen seriously. It's really important…"

Sort of flushing her cheeks, Machina brought her face closer to me.

"I felt bad for my sister, so I always worried about it. I kept it vague the whole time. But I can't hold it in anymore, so I'll tell you properly."

Flushing her smooth cheeks even more, Machina looked at me with somewhat damp eyes and slowly mixed her tone with affection.

"I love you, Shinobu. Not as a family, but I love you as a man."

"…I- Is, Is that so?"

"Yes. I have a strong desire to monopolize, but with you I can endure it. The demon realm has polygamy anyway. If it's not too much trouble for you, give me a lot of affection too, like with my sister."

…The chokers I gave Luna and Machina. To female devils they were like an engagement ring. Since I heard that from the Old Man, I had pictured it to myself to some extent.

But being told directly again was indeed a great shock and unable to say anything, I opened and closed my mouth like a goldfish gasping for air, whereupon

“I love you, Shinobu.”

While forming a faint smile with her red cheeks, Machina brought her pink well-formed lips closer.

“Unless you’re against it, I’ll stay with you forever.”

With a really charming smile that captivated me, she slowly stole my lips gently… but this development was bad.

I would never chase Machina away from now on. Plus, the demon realm had polygamy. I got the feeling that as long Machina kept that value, she would never back down. That was what I thought from seeing her bright smile.

…But what was I supposed to do? Still unable to respond to Machina, I was greatly perplexed internal and made a big sigh in my heart…

* * *

The last day of the student council election. The election campaign with the concentrated effort of the whole class would come to an end today at last, but… would Machina really be fine?

All students assembled in the gym to hear the speeches of the candidates. Inside the gym were the support speeches and speeches from the candidates themselves held. As for Machina,

“I, I just have to read from the script. I’ll work out. It’ll be fine…”

For a while now, Machina was restlessly mumbling to herself with the script for her speech in one hand at the back of the wing of the stage. But that might be understandable.

Machina’s speech was the last. Furthermore, right after the current Vice-President, Himuro-san. She must have felt all kinds of pressure from going out after her biggest rival.

I exchanged a look with Hijiri, who stood besides Machina, then we both softly called out to her to reduce her nervousness even a bit.

“Ehm, Machina-san, for starters, take a deep breath.”

“Right. You better calm… Mh?”
Somehow I got the feeling that I saw Kaorun and Elni in the corner of my vision. I thought I was mistaken, but it really were them. Both of them fairly wore our school uniform and approached in my direction like it goes without saying.
“Wh- Why are you here, Elni, Kaoru?”
“You need to ask? We’re here to cheer for you.”
“I agree with Elni-san. After all it is your gala occasion.”
Elni and Kaorun each replied with a smile, whereupon
“”E- Elni-chan, Kaoru-san, please do not leave me behind.”
The familiar beautiful voice reached my ears, then Luna showed up in the wing of the stage this time. Like the other two, she was dressed in the school uniform and as soon as she noticed me, she came rushing over with a smile, but tripped midway with a “Kyaa”.
“Y- You sure trip on even grounds sometimes…”
When I reached out my hand to her with “Are you okay?” and a wry smile, Luna blushed.
“S- Somehow, even I got nervous. Uhm, sorry…”
She took my hand and stood up, shifting her gaze to Machina with still red cheeks.
“Machina, please be careful that you do not trip like I did.”
S- Surely Machina wouldn’t trip as well… When I thought that, Kaorun and Elni clapped her hands for whatever reason after hearing Luna’s words.
“I have hit on an idea. What do you say about going for a gag by tripping in front of the audience? I believe it will be well received.”
“I agree with Kaorun. Listen Machina, it shouldn’t look played. Like you Luna, you have to pretend to trip naturally.”
“Ehm, I was not pretending to trip, you know? I do no really know how, but sometimes I just trip. I wonder why?”
Luna aside, who tilted her head sadly, Kaorun and Elni were most likely joking like always to ease Machina’s nervousness. The two shifted their gaze to Hijiri and cracked another joke with a smile.
“Therefore, Hijiri-chan, please trip before your speech as well.”
“Yeah, a so called repetitive gag. That’ll be perfect.”

“Ehm, that’s embarrassing, so I would like to do it normally…”

The troubled Hijiri showed a wry smile, whereupon Machina giggled.

“Thanks for coming to cheer me on, Sister, Elni, Kaoaru. I’m fine now.”

Apparently the jokes did the trick. Machina regained her usual composure and a bit later Hijiri got on the stage and held her support stage. While we all watched over her, Machina suddenly faced me and handed me the script for the speech she was holding.

“Shinobu, hold on it for me.”

“Mh? You don’t need it? I’m sure you have memorized it, but wouldn’t it be better to take it with you just in case? Won’t you be in trouble if you get stuck?”

“I feel bad for everyone that helped me on it, but I don’t need that script anymore. It’s full of promises and official stances, but none of my feelings.”

Showing a gentle smile,

“I properly want to convey my feelings to everyone. I think that’s more important than any promises. Though it’s certainly embarrassing…”

She slowly reached out her hand towards me.

“I’ll give it my all, so take a good look at me, Shinobu.”

Dearly touching my cheeks with her soft palm, Machina slowly and confident got onto the stage after Hijiri’s speech ended while Luna, Elni and Kaorun cheered her on with “Good luck”.

Upon that, the looks from all students were concentrated on Machina, but she didn’t show any nervousness and after a short pause, she calmly started talking through the prepared microphone.

“To begin with, I have to apologize to all of you. When I transferred into this school, I hated everyone, be it my classmates, other students or the teachers.”

…Wh- What a thing to say first. On this unexpected utterance, the students started to make a ruckus at once too. I inadvertently panicked, but Machina’s expression didn’t sway. While her amber eyes were filled with a strong will, she continued her speech by raising her voice a bit.

“In my childhood I was betrayed by my friends and lost a precious person. That’s why I came to hate people, refused to trust them ever again and was called a ’failure’ at my new place, but I told myself that I would never return to that previous place.”

Surely the new place meant the demon realm.

“So when I transferred here, I thought I would get betrayed again and kept hating everyone. But over time I met various people and made friends and a new family. They all reminded me of something important.”

Filling her calm tone with warmth,

“—Treat everyone kindly. Become strong enough to protect everyone. Then everyone will return the kindness.”

Proudly throwing out her chest,

“That’s what my mother taught me. Just like my mother had said, everyone, not just my family, return the kindness to me. They worked hard for my sake. Thank you so much, Shinobu, Sister, Elni, Nazuna, Tomoe-san, Hijiri, Kaoru, Minami, Asada, Katagiri…”

Speaking out not just our names, but from all classmates, Machina dyed her cheeks in a rose-colour and smiled.

“I think I could change a bit by spending time with everyone. Before I noticed it, I had fallen in love with this school. I loved it so much that I was embarrassed about myself for hating everyone before.”

The ruckus of the students completely died out at some point and drawn in my Machina’s smile, they all closed their mouths, just looking at her fascinated.

“I want to get along with everyone even better. I want to be strong enough to protect everyone. This time I properly want to live at this place that I once fled before. I want to improve this school that has all these people dear to me, so I’ll devote my everything to it.”

After speaking out her strong feelings, Machina took a small breath and showed a wry smile.

“I’m sorry. I can’t express it well and might not have gotten my point across, but thank your for listening until the end despite that.”

When Machina finished her speech along with a deep bow, a small applause sounded from here and there and very fast that applause grew louder, echoing through the whole gym. Seeing that, Machina flustered turned bright red.

“Orangelo-san! I love you too!” “I love you tooo!” “I’ll definitely vote

for you!” “If it’s you, Orangelo-san, I can count you unworried!” “Liven up the school!” “If you ever have any troubles, I’ll help out!”
Even though the voting wasn’t over yet, other students besides our classmates raised loud voices too, evoking an heartfelt cheering.
Watching everyone with her eyes wide open, Machina started to show tears in her eyes before long.
On the other hand, Luna, Hijiri and Kaorun watched over Machina from the wing of the stage. All of them were smiling faintly, but
“…Machina is fine now… With that I too can…”
Unlike everyone else, only Elni filled her smile with sadness.
I was a bit concerned, but Elni showed smiling face right afterwards and rushed over to Machina, who came down from the stage, so in the end I couldn’t say anything…

The speeches were over and I was on my way back from the toilet. I walked down the passage all alone, whereupon I was suddenly called out with “Nanjou”. When I shifted my vision to the familiar sharp voice, there stood the Old Man dressed in a black suit.
…He probably came to hear Machina’s speech too.

While I was a bit surprised about his sudden appearance though, the Old Man beckoned me with his index finger, still looking at me. When I set out in response, the Old Man moved to the back of the school building with me, as wanted to avoid the public eye. On the way, the Old Man smiled somewhat satisfied and hooked on by that, I also smiled faintly and opened my mouth.

"Hey Old Man, what do you say about Machina's speech?"

"…It was quite good."

Replying with a firm nod, the Old Man brightened his smile and looked at me.

"Nanjou, it's about time I head back to the demon realm, but I'm indebted to you. Before I leave, I want to thank you and make up for it."

"Amends alone will suffice. For starters, put your love in it and call me 'Shinobu-sama'."

"…I'm not gonna play along with your jokes."

Replying wearily, the Old Man dropped his voice a bit.

"This time I wasn't just indebted to you, but to Elni for various things as well. So I have to listen to a request of hers now. I'll make it up to you after that."

"A request from Elni?"

"I can't tell you any more. Elni forbid me to. But in time, you'll understand."

Filling his expression somewhat with sadness,

"I'm entrusting Luna and Machina to you. I have no concerns when it's you. Just, be nice to Elni too. She's a really… lonely girl."

Leaving behind some profound words, the Old Man turned his back to me like that.

"Hey Old Man, what do you mean by that? Is something up with Elni?"

"…I said I can't tell you."

"I get it. Nothing I can do then. Anyway, don't you need to speak with Luna and Machina? You're leaving now, right?"

On my question, the Old Man took out his cell phone with his back still to me and replied.

"With this, I can talk to them anytime. No problems at all. Besides, I can't forget the exorcists. I'll leave at once, but"

Slowly interrupting his words,
"Don't make my girls cry… Shinobu."
The Old Man showed a somewhat peaceful expression and softly called my name.
After I gave my farewell to the Old Man by lightly waving my hand, I remained at the spot for a while and kept thinking by myself. Just what did Elni ask of the Old Man…?

Epilogue

…Somehow it turned out that I was going home alone recently.
After a lot of things, the election campaign ended and thanks to everyone's hard work and her speech, Machina was elected as the student president, but she had no time to be happy about that for long, as her position kept her busy and we couldn't go home together.
On a different note, Elni showed her usual smile and made me laugh with her usual stupid stunts, so I forgot the words from the Old Man.
As for me, I couldn't go home with Machina today either and after school I sadly left the shoe locker behind me, slowly approaching the school gate.
During that I suddenly spotted a silver-haired girl.
…She must have been waiting for me? She leaned against the wall in front of the gate and I opened my mouth a bit surprised.
"What're you doing here, Elni?"
"Well, I was in the area, so I was waiting for you. Let's go home together. You're lonely because you can't go home with Machina, right?"
"…More or less."
Replying to my outcall with a smile, Elni pointed out the truth.
On the other hand, I showed a wry smile and walked alongside her homewards while engaging in a silly chit-chat with her. Upon that, suddenly a cold gust of wind blew and we two shivered our bodies a bit.

“Geez, it sure feels like winter.”

“Yeah. I hate the cold, so I want to go somewhere warm. My worry is gone now too.”

“…Worry?”

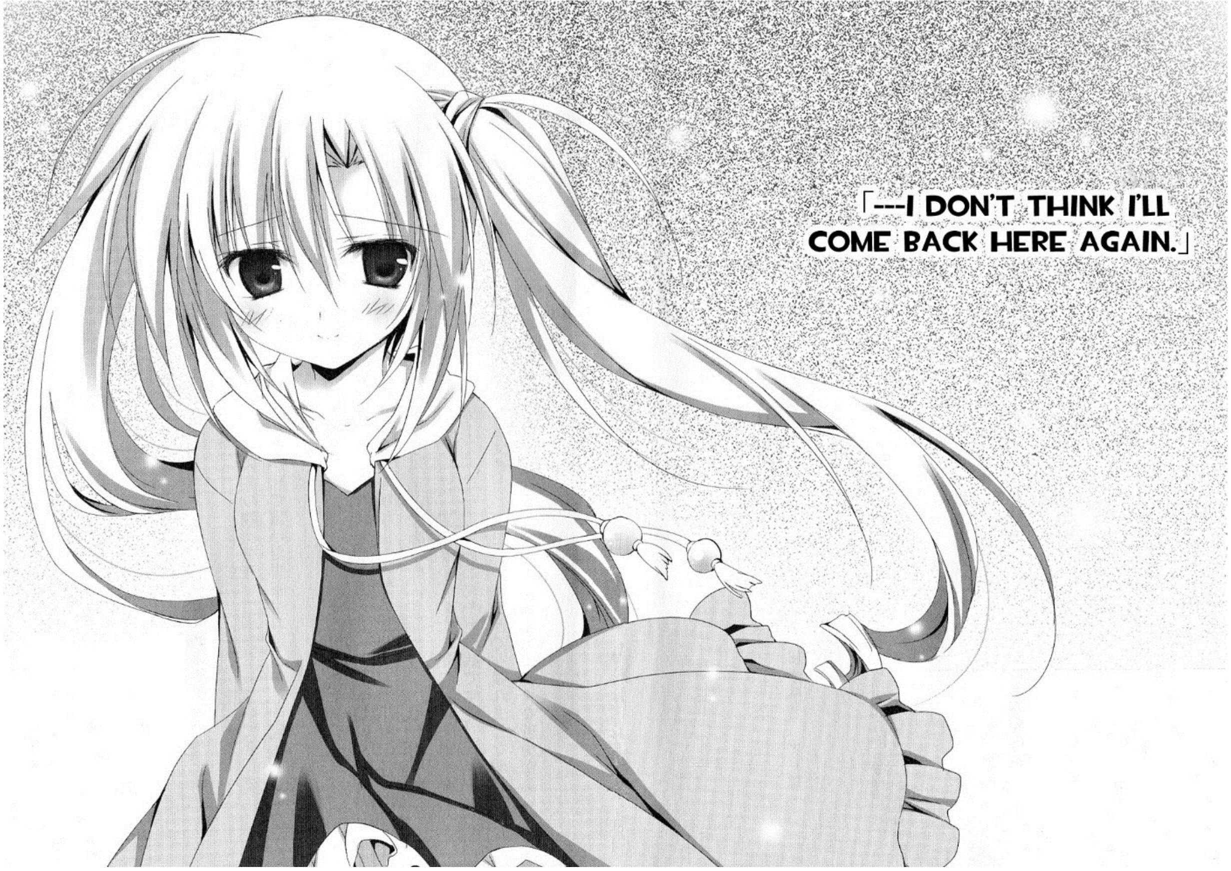
I asked back like parrot, whereas Elni dropped a shadow over her expression and answered.

“Machina can live in the human world now. You too have become kinder and stronger since I met you. Luna, Machina and Hijiri are by your side. So there’s nothing to worry about anymore. I can go on trip with a peace of mind.”

“…It’s just a trip, isn’t it? What’re you talking about so suddenly? You’ll properly come back to us, right?”

Feeling a strong uneasiness, I asked a question with a slightly shallow voice.

Elni replied to that quiet sadly with an expression close to tears.


「---I DON’T THINK I’LL COME BACK HERE AGAIN.」